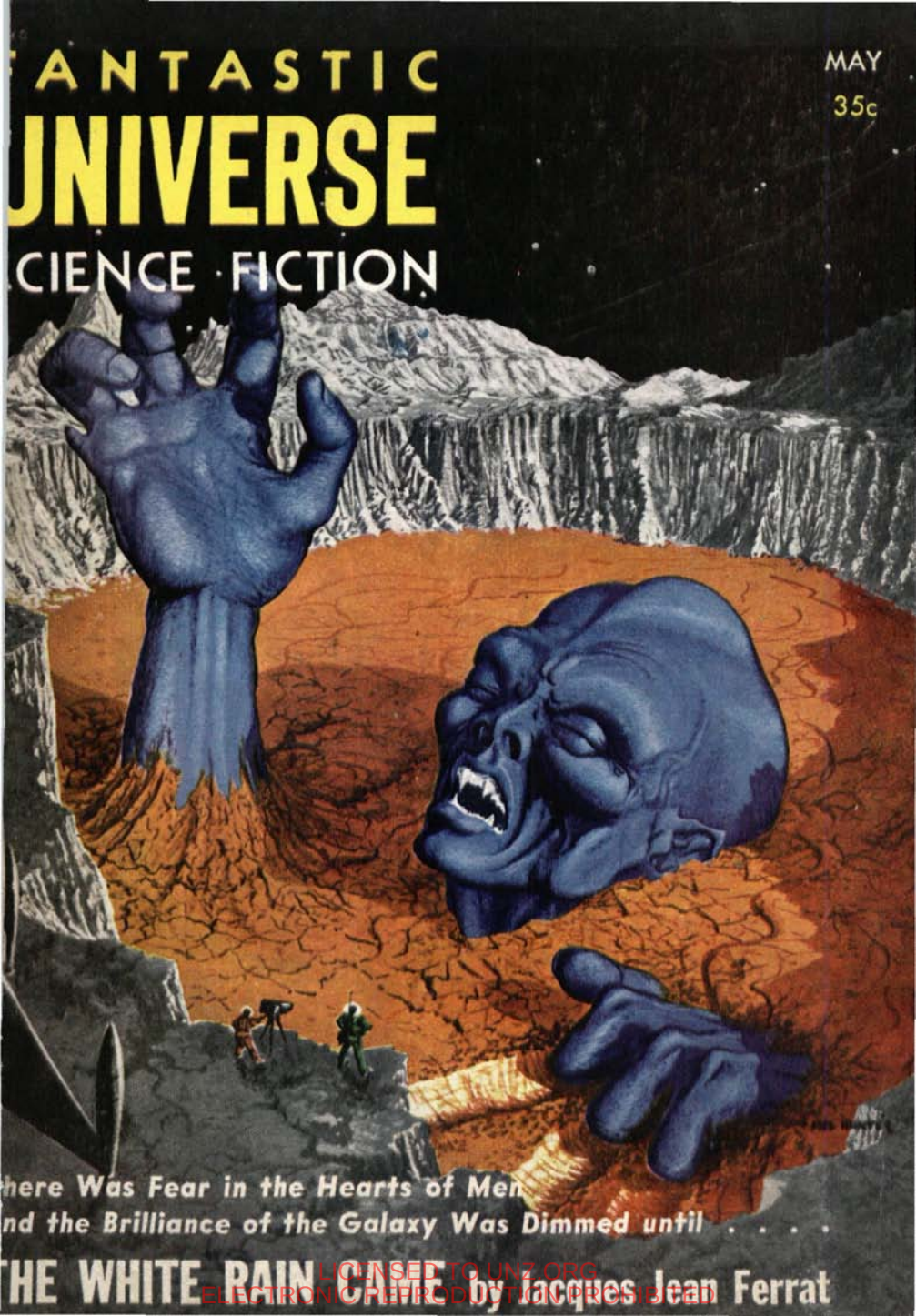
ANTASTIC
UNIVERSE
CIENCE FICTION
MAY
35c
here Was Fear in the Hearts of Men
nd the Brilliance of the Galaxy Was Dimmed until . . . .
THE WHITE RAIN CAME by Jacques Jean Ferrat
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THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER . . .

There were giants in the Earth in those days!

Yes, there were giants, truly, but who can say with any certainty how huge they were and how great were their numbers, how human by our standards their pomps and prides and burial customs? Of this only can we be sure. They lived and breathed the familiar airs of Earth, they tramped the green valleys, they stood on the high peaks and gazed westward at the sea.

The story begins on a gray afternoon in 1935, when an eager young anthropologist, no stranger to the teeming, multi-tapestried shops and bazaars of Canton and Hong Kong, stands staring in amazement at a tray of "dragon's teeth" in a Chinese drugstore. In Ming Dynasty China "dragon's teeth" were cure-alls for an incredible assortment of maladies both mental and physical and as miracle remedies they are treasured today. But young Von Koenigswald was afflicted with a Western malady, if malady it can be called. In him blazed an insatiable curiosity as to man's buried past on Earth, his struggles and despairs and hard-won victories in the far away and long ago.

Now amidst the "dragon's teeth" Von Koenigswald sees a wonder beyond his wildest expectations—the teeth of a dragon slayer mighty in girth! Human teeth surely, for when indeed has man not been a slayer of dragons, fire-breathing and terrible in their wrath. The dragons of flood and earthquake and unregenerate Earth-toppling desire, and even the dragons of a minor toothache or a minor war.

But these teeth are not merely the teeth of a Goliath. They are the teeth of an ancient giant man so towering and formidable that his very tread must have shaken the sands of the Gobi and struck terror to the beasts that dared dispute his domain.

The bones of that giant have not yet been found. When volcanos poured their floods of mud and molten lava and his remains were carried westward to the sea his story became a half-forgotten nursery tale, a Cyclops-fantasy to frighten the Specter Tarsierlike offspring—wild of eye and gesture—of incredibly tiny modern man.

But suppose—just suppose—a little group of modern men of science with cameras and tape-recording systems all supplied should dig without too much caution into the buried past of a secret Time's tyranny has kept well concealed beneath far, glimmering stars. Suppose the giant should stir again and throw his gaunt arms skyward, and shout his defiance and walk again with terrible, earth-shaking strides!

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, Vol. 3, No. 4. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 471 Park Ave., N. Y. 22, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, New York, New York. The characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious and have no relation to any persons living or dead. Copyright 1955, by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC. MAY, 1955. PRINTED IN U. S. A.

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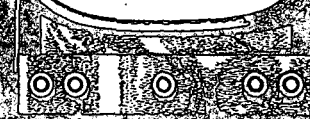

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the white rain came

by . . . Jacques Jean Ferrat

There was need on Mars for folly half sublime and a man's delight in recklessness. But a woman's steadfast gifts were needed more.

HAD LYNNE FENLAY been less proud, she would have wept, openly and unashamedly. Standing before the altar, directly in back of her twin, Revere Fenlay, and his bride, Lao Mei-O'Connell, she felt acutely homesick for Earth. Intellectually, of course, she understood and accepted the need for multiple marriages on Mars. But she could not evade a sense of emotional outrage at the assembly-line method of marriage which circumstances had made mandatory on the alien planet that was now her home.

The marrying officer, who trebled in brass as a circuit judge and an electronics expert on the thinly settled Red Planet, wore only a shabby-looking, round-cornered apron. Although it bore the twin-worlds insignia, emblem of his high office, it was tucked with a careless lack of dignity into the top of his well-worn clout, and everyone could see that one of the tie-strings was missing.

A bald-headed little man with an incipient paunch and knobby knees, he intoned the brief ceremony from

Do you remember Jacques Jean Ferrat's NIGHTMARE TOWER? *We're sure you do if we had the privilege of numbering you among our earliest readers, for the story appeared in the very first issue of* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *and its swift, unusual plot and brilliant characterization were so astonishingly vital as to make it quite unforgettable. Since then demands for a sequel have been so insistent that when Mr. Ferrat walked into our office with this exciting lead novelette in his briefcase our joy was unconfined.*

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rote, never glancing either at the book in his right hand, or at the faces of the four couples standing directly in front of him.

". . . and to be mutually faithful during the period of enforced separation, to work honorably for one another and for the planet upon their reunion, to provide a home for the sons and daughters of their union. For these purposes, by the virtue of the power embodied in my . . ."

He mumbled on, running the words together in his haste to conclude the ceremony which would unite the four couples from far Barkutburg, and enable him to get on with the marriages from New Walla Walla, Cathayville, Zuleika and the other major settlements of Mars. A few kilometers away, a spaceship was waiting to take the brides of the Red Planet home to Earth to bear their children—a function which was not possible of fulfillment in the light gravity of Mars.

All of the brides were pregnant. In tacit accordance with the dictates of expediency in frontier settlements all through man's history on Earth and, more lately, on Mars, a marriage was not a marriage until offspring were on the way. When a couple decided to mate, it was only necessary for them to sign a register and share quarters as provisional husband and wife. The arrangement would remain in force as long as it gave satisfaction to both parties. If it failed divorce became merely a matter of signing another registry.

But once a child had been conceived, casualness vanished, for the bringing of Martian children back to Mars was a major factor in the effort to populate the planet. Such children were its hope, its future, against the time when man should have conquered his new environment, and child-bearing no longer necessitated a hasty return to Earth.

For the rest, Mars was populated by expert technicians, officials and the halves of genetically induced identical twins—of which Lynne and Revere Fenlay were unusually gifted examples. The purpose of this plan was to give the new planet Earth's hereditary best without stripping the home planet of its most promising young folk. One twin, conditioned for Earth, stayed at home—the other, carefully trained from infancy to endure and triumph over the hardships of life on the Red Planet, went to Mars.

Lynne was one of the few Earth-trained twins ever sent to Mars to join her brother. Her telepathic genius, of a range and sensitivity almost unknown on the home planet, with its dense atmosphere and other inhibiting factors, had been urgently needed in a desperate crisis when the telepathic lateral communications of Mars had been threatened with destruction by strange electronically-revivified survivals of the original Martians. She had been needed, and once the crisis had been conquered, she had

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stayed on to aid in new telepathic research. She had stayed on, and now—she was rebellious and homesick.

There was a gaunt, stripped-down, machine-shop look to the great hall. In New Samarkand, the planetary capital where the ceremonies were being conducted, the established ritual never varied. The marrying officer stood on a low platform, and at his back rose a portable altar surmounted by the symbol of universal faith. This consisted of a cross for Christianity, in a circle representing the "wheel of life" religions, and outside its circumference smaller crosses with their ends bent at right angles to represent the symbol of still older faiths.

It had been battered by constant usage, and one of the tips was rudely broken off. Recalling the symbolic beauty of the ritual that still enhanced marriage ceremonies on Earth, and contrasting it with the crude matter-of-factness of Martian multiple weddings Lynne wished, and not for the first time, that she had not permitted Rolf Marcein to talk her into coming to Mars.

She cast a quick sidelong glance at Rolf. He stood almost directly behind the second bride, a lean, sun-bronzed figure towering over the other guests, a sensually suggestive smile on his lips which was anything but reassuring. He winked as he returned her glance. Even less reassuring was her certain knowledge that Rolf was drunk. The monthly, multiple marriages on Mars accompanied as they were by the prospects of incipient parentage and immediate long separation, had degenerated into one big farewell carnival.

This one, as far as Lynne was concerned, had begun three Martian days earlier when the settlers of the Barkutburg station—the residence of Lao, Revere and, until recently, of Lynne—had thrown a thirty-six hour wingding for the departing bride. Lynne had attended, of course, out of devotion to her twin and his wife. But since her neuro-emotional makeup was too fine-tuned to enable her to enjoy alcohol in quantity, she had been something of a spectre at the feast.

The journey to New Samarkand had been a brief interlude between binges, followed by another revel on the eve of the official wedding. This time, Rolf had been on hand and, under his prompting, Lynne had taken a little too much and was suffering the inevitable after-effects. Rolf, apparently, was just getting up a full head of steam. She wondered if the travesty of a ceremony was ever going to end.

". . . and so I now pronounce you men and wives," the marrying officer finally finished. Ushers hastily escorted the couples and their attendants to a vestry, where the record books were signed, while another group of brides, grooms and attendants, came forward to be joined in wedlock.

Ceremony, Lynne thought, *by*

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courtesy only. Travesty would have been a far more accurate term. She glanced at Rolf again as he signed his name with a flourish in the book, wondering what *her* wedding would be like—*if* she ever married. At the moment, the idea was thoroughly repugnant to her.

"Come on, *vinral,*" said Rolf, using the Martian term of endearment as he gathered her in with his huge left hand. "Sign here—and then over here, in this book. *Crehut,* I thought old Bretinslov would never finish that blah-blah of his."

Signing dutifully, Lynne said, "That blah-blah, as you call it, legalizes the serious vows of a marriage ceremony." It seemed a little incredible to her that she should find herself defending a ritual which she had decried mentally only moments before. But Rolf's attitude somehow infuriated her.

Rolf, whose eyes seemed pinker and foggier than usual, ran his tongue between his teeth and said, "Come on, *vinral,* my mouth is drier than desert dust. Let's get over to the reception room and kiss the brides and get a drink. They're serving some of the new champagne-lichenwasser the bio lab has synthesized, to its everlasting credit and glory."

Lynne, unable to adjust herself to the recklessly riotous spirit of Mars on a binge, said, "Rolf, dear, don't you think you've had enough? After all, there's a limit to—"

"Enough?" Rolf interrupted her, with an incredulous grimace. "Lynne, this party's just getting started. After we see off the brides, we're going to settle down to some real drinking." So saying, he pinched her, hard, where men have pinched women since time immemorial.

To her horror, she found herself on the verge of tears. She was glad she could cover her weakness by struggling with an outward display of assurance into the aluminum-fabric coverall that was uniform protection against the chill Martian outdoors, and the oxy-respirator worn for occasional revivifying whiffs against the thinness of the atmosphere.

She sat on somebody's lap, securely wedged with the others into a land-runner for the half-kilometer trip to the reception hall. Around her, Rolf and the rest, joined in the rousing, ribald first chorus of *The Farmer's Martian Daughter,* making her head ring with a volume of sound which was almost unbearable inside such a confined space. At that moment, she hated them all.

Nor was her dislike merely a matter of personal pique. She had felt the malaise for some time, felt it so gradually, so far below the level of her conscious mind, that she had been unaware of its creeping progress. Like the *ping* of an antique radar, a subconscious thought from the mind of her twin, Revere Fenlay, registered. He was thinking of his bride, Lao Mei-O'Connell, and his thought ran,

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I'm glad she's going to be away from Mars for the next ten months. There's bound to be trouble and I don't want her in danger—especially while she's carrying our child.

Lynne stifled an impulse to probe Revere's mind with a telepathic inquiry as to the nature of the danger. She decided there would be time for that after Lao Fenlay and the other brides of the season were safely on their way to the home planet. But with awareness of Revere's awareness, Lynne realized that some of her unhappiness was rooted not in homesickness but in unaccepted telepathic fears of her own—fears whose nature she could not pin down.

She probed Rolf's mind carelessly and received a wholeheartedly carnal picture of Rolf and herself that caused her to drop that line of inquiry instantly. She was not in the mood for—what did he call it?—such *ferkab* canoodling. At the moment she hated the man—and not the least of her hatred's causes lay in the very inevitability of her ultimate surrender to him. The *marlet.*

Watch your language, you ZWIRCHY VINRAL," came his answering thought. Lynne sealed her mind as tightly as her lips the rest of the way to the reception hall.

Here, beneath a girdered ceiling adorned with the stunted evergreens grown by Earthmen on Mars, a table had been set up for the marriage parties of each city, according to tradition. Accustomed to the fabricated foods of Earth, Lynne was astonished at the lavish display of barbecued boar, Marsapples and other delicacies, including plump forty-pound capon-turkeys, the pride of the husbandry labs.

She told herself she was not hungry. But she ate notwithstanding—while Rolf and the other men went right on drinking. Thanks to the small, closely interrelated population of the Red Planet, there was much intermingling of the groups, and Lynne, to her surprise, found herself facing a grinning, strapping, dark-skinned girl who said, "Welcome, Lynne Fenlay. Try some of the food at our table."

It was the young animal husbandry girl — Joanna Wheatley — who had shared a cabin with her on the spaceship during the journey from Earth the year before. Joanna seemed to have entered into the festivities with all the vitality of her youth and her uninhibited mixture of Caucasian, Oriental and Hamitic blood strains. But when Lynne asked her how her work was going, Joanna's face fell.

"I don't like it," she said. "We must irrigate to support any sort of animal life, and irrigation is draining the moisture from the atmosphere table faster than we can create it. But you must know the problem, Lynne. It's the *farbish* curse of all Mars."

"I know," said Lynne, trying to encourage the girl. "But one of these days we'll have it licked and,

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if I know farmers, you'll all be complaining because too much rain is spoiling the crops."

Joanna failed to smile. She said, "I'd give my right arm for that day to come tomorrow. If we hadn't been able to install a transmuter to feed a small pond recently, our cattle would be dead. And our farm —Woomera Station—has the most fertile soil on Mars. Right next door, it's so radioactive we've had to fence it off."

"Radioactive?" said Lynne, wondering why she hadn't heard of such a deposit.

"Maybe that's not the exact word," said Joanna. *"Crehut,* I'm no geologist—I'm in husbandry. But it has remarkable health-giving qualities—and some deadly ones as well. Still, it's not solving the moisture problem for us."

"You really feel it's serious?" asked Lynne, sensing the deep concern in the girl's mind, the fright.

"Unless some new factor can be found that will increase moisture, it will defeat us," said Joanna solemnly. Then, actually shaking herself out of her despondency, the dark girl went on, "But this is not the time for care. My best friend has just married and will soon be off for Earth to have her baby. You come and see our farm as soon as you can, will you, Lynne? I think you'd be interested."

"I know I shall be," Lynne said, pressing the girl's hand. "As soon as I can."

She joined Joanna in a toast to her friend and groom, then brought the girl to the Barkutburg table to meet Revere, Lao Mei-O'Connell and Rolf.

Rolf leered at Joanna and said, "I'll be out to see you the first time Lynne's not looking."

And Joanna threw back her head and laughed, revealing twin rows of flashing white teeth.

Lynne knew the amorously mocking banter was harmless enough in itself. Rolf worked tirelessly, conscientiously for months on end, and surely he had a right to make love lightly with his eyes. But her Earth indoctrination would not permit her to approve of such uninhibited revelry as was the custom on Mars when the bars were let down. She thought of Rolf's thousand women subordinates in his post as Communications Coordinator, and wondered how many of them. . . .

Watch yourself, VINRAL, came his mocking thought.

Lynne felt herself blush. She turned away and took a beaker of lichenwasser and downed it quickly. But it didn't intoxicate her—it merely increased her physical discomfort and spiritual irritation. She said farewell to Revere's bride, elected leader of the Barkutburg center, and then, when the others took off, roistering, for the spaceport, she stayed behind in the cloakroom. Though it was what she wanted, her wretchedness was not lessened by the fact that apparently no one missed her. Especially Rolf . . .

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She decided to return to Nampura Depot alone, to reassure her ego by being of some practical use to somebody. It was, she thought miserably, beginning to look as if the only real happiness and fulfillment she was ever to achieve lay in her work alone. The growth of her telepathic talent had been responsible for the breakup not only of her engagement to a young man on Earth, but for the loss of her job as coordinating member of one of the highly specialized human brain-teams that, operating in conjunction with electronic computers, solved the more difficult and intricate material and mechanical problems of the mother planet.

It had been her job, as coordinator, to obtain problem solutions that humanized and made realistic the sometimes over-abstruse answers that emanated from the machines, in response to the data fed into them by her human teammates. As her telepathic talent improved, her answers had become too perfect, which meant she had fallen into rapport with the computer rather than the human elements of the team—a psychological maladroitness which had led to her dismissal. It was a desperate need for telepaths on Mars that had brought her to the Red Planet.

Climbing aboard one of the bi-hourly transports for Nampura Depot, Lynne faced the fact that her entire life, up to her transfer to Mars, had been planned and lived with the single aim of enabling her to adjust to the manners and mores of a densely populated, highly civilized, almost effete Earth. On Mars, with its vast open spaces and free-wheeling pioneer anarchy and virility, she was a misfit.

As the transport jetted upward through the paper-thin atmosphere, soaring above the miracle medley of towering, lacy, ancient Martian ruins and rough, utilitarian Earth-man-built structures alongside the old canal, Lynne wondered unhappily what she was going to do about Rolf.

She adored his every pore, his every muscle, but whether she could long endure the strain of living with him in Martian wedlock was something else again. There was a wild, undisciplined streak in Rolf that violated her ultra-civilized Earth-bred restraint. It could be exciting—marriage to Rolf—but it would be distasteful, too.

Lynne opened her mind to exchange thoughts with him when another, more powerful, more urgent message reached her from the teleteam on duty at Nampura Depot. Its combination of two telepathic minds in unison was overpowering. It said, *we're in touch, we've finally found it, we're about to make contact—*

Then came a brain-wrenching flash, and—nothing at all.

II

Something had happened at Nampura Depot and the resultant con-

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fusion was frightening. Lynne tried vainly to sort out the welter of disorganized and often completely unintelligible thoughts that radiated from the recently set-up telepathic laboratory of Mars. The team on duty—plump, delicate Rana Spinelli and lanky, awkward Juan Olsen—had been stricken from some mysterious source. Juan was dead, Rana mentally erased by whatever had happened. That much a suddenly depersonalized Lynne Fenlay clearly understood.

But the rest was telepathic bedlam. "*. . . simply working on Problem Outpost . . . and I had a date after dinner with Juan . . . as if he'd been mashed flat . . . can't understand how it happened . . . Rana's not breathing . . . yes, but she's in coma—almost catatonic . . . after lunch, she told me she and Juan were going to try . . . and Rolf Marcein would be at the weddings . . . Fenlay, too, and his sister . . . we've got to . . .*"

The Nampura Depot transport hit an atmospheric dead spot and the messages faded out. In her anxiety to join her fellow-telepaths and help them in whatever emergency had arisen, Lynne's malaise, her revulsion toward Rolf in his cups, vanished. She was needed—and that was all that mattered at the moment.

The transport moved swiftly toward the reddish sun, enlarged almost to Earth-size as it sank toward the western horizon. Below, the red-and-green desolation that was most of Mars seemed to stretch endlessly toward the horizon. A vast ruined city, running parallel for twenty-seven miles with the left bank of one of the great dry canals, lifted its filigree spires above the purple dusk to trace patterns of breathtaking beauty in the sunset. This was Mars, a vast mausoleum stirring faintly with new raw life breathed into it by the colonists from Earth.

Moving uneasily in her seat as she smoked a cigarette of excellent canalside leaf, Lynne felt her homesickness vanish. This was the real world, the real job—restoring to life a long-dead world. Compared to it the constricted existence of overcrowded, static Earth seemed artificial, even a trifle inhuman.

She was glad Rolf had let himself go at the weddings. At least he had had more to drink and had concealed it better than anyone else at the ceremony. If you lived as hard as Rolf and the other Martians lived—as they had to live to make headway against the cruel remorseless environment—you had a right to get drunk on occasion, she told herself vehemently. Colafizzes were for children, or the puling neurotics of Earth. Lynne slipped a coin into the dispenser-slot by her seat, and drank the cup of lichen-wasser she received in return. This time, she felt no discomfort—the Martian distillation sang its happy song through her veins.

Mars, she thought, silently toasting the Red Planet, *you may have*

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destroyed your own species, but you won't destroy us!

Sobering a little, Lynne considered the fact that Mars had not totally destroyed all native forms of existence. Outside of the lichens and other flora, there were still the ugly czanworms that burrowed ceaselessly beneath the planet's arid surface and were the despair of cable layers.

And there had been the disembodied descendants of the aboriginal subject species which, revivified by the Earthmen's use of the electricity upon which they thrived, had for decades made open-circuit electronic communication impossible, and had then sought possession of the telepaths with which the colonists had supplanted mechanical means of talking over long distances around the Red Planet's surface.

Might there not be still other life-forms, unseeable, unapproachable by Earthmen, surviving on Mars? That was one of the problems Nampura Depot T-teams were trying to solve. Had Spinelli-Olsen found something to their sorrow? Had they left records? Probably not. Lynne cursed the competitive instinct that flourished on Mars and, at times, made the cooperative sharing of knowledge so difficult.

Yes, there were problems. She recalled, somberly, what Joanna had told her about the necessity of improving irrigation methods if domestic animal life was to be maintained and developed. There were the black, short-tusked boars, of course—fiftieth-generation descendants of pigs imported by Earthmen, who had, as always, adapted themselves to their environment and run wild.

But you couldn't live on pork alone. Lynne looked into the sunset and, by its soft light, at the endless aridity around her. Until the atmosphere was re-thickened — it would take many decades and a miracle of human accomplishment through slow mechanical processes —there could be no rain on Mars. And until there was rain there could be no regular plant-growth cycle with its symbiotic animal relationships.

If the miniscule amount of animal husbandry on Mars used up the atmosphere too rapidly, the entire Earth settlement project, which already numbered almost a million human beings, would be imperilled. You couldn't feed a million men and women on what could be brought from the home planet in space cargo vessels. But how could you get rain when there was no moisture in the atmosphere, almost no atmosphere to moisten?

It was, Lynne decided, the most frighteningly disheartening of vicious cycles.

The ship came out of the atmospheric dead spot and the fear and confusion of Nampura Depot encroached alarmingly on Lynne's thoughts again. So difficult was it to follow the babel of minds that she gave up and waited impatiently

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while the transport described its slow downward parabola to come to rest, in the violet dusk, on the flare-lit airfield of the Depot. She thanked the captain for his courtesy and hopped a supply truck to the Depot proper.

As the newest of official structures built by Earthmen on Mars, the Depot represented the most advanced attempts to develop an architectural blend between terrestrial utilitarianism and the eclectic delicacy of ancient Martian building wizardry. In daylight, it looked to Lynne like a Quonset hut with flying buttresses. She was grateful for the darkness, as the supply truck rolled up to its service gate.

Tony Willis, the non-telepathic, stout, bespectacled communications wizard who served as Depot Seneschal, greeted Lynne with a hug and a *"Crehut,* I'm glad you're here, angel. Something pretty ugly has happened. Where's Rolf?"

"Something happened to him, too—he got drunk at the weddings," said Lynne, stepping out of her coverall. "But I'd like to know just how serious the situation here is, Tony. I got some pretty mixed-up flashes on the transport. Am I right in believing that poor Juan is dead—and Rana still unconscious."

"Total blackout," said Willis grimly, escorting her to the cubicle that served as his office, a windowless, brightly-lighted room decorated with the wiry, brown-skinned maidens that passed as pinup girls on Mars. Seated behind a desk across from her, he said, "You know I'm a mess on this TP stuff. But Juan and Rana were on to something. They've been thick as the proverbial thieves, waiting for you and Rolf to get away so they could do some experimenting on their own. Then, about an hour ago—" He looked at her, and his lips tightened—"Juan was flattened as if a 'dozer had passed over him and Rana was blasted against the wall of the Rec Room and hasn't come out of it since."

"An explosion?" Lynne asked swiftly, anxiously.

Tony Willis shook his sandy head. "Not the way you think," he told her. "Oh, there was an explosion, all right. It blew the Rec Room all to hell and gone. *But it had no mechanical origin!"*

Somehow, in his grimness, tubby Tony looked gaunt. Lynne probed his mind swiftly, and got a vivid picture of the shattered room, of Rana lying crumpled at the foot of a wall, and—she shuddered and clenched her fists tightly as the vision became almost unendurable. She asked, "Any records, Tony?"

He shrugged his shoulders in despair, and thrust a folder toward her. It contained a single sheet of paper on which Rana had drawn a crude self-portrait, depicting her face in caricature, with her tongue out and her eyes crossed. Beneath it she had scrawled, *This is what you get for snooping.*

Silently cursing the Hindu-Italian

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girl's immaturity, Lynne sat frowning, elbows on Tony's desk, trying to recall what she could of Problem Outpost and the role of the Spinelli-Olsen team in the project. The concept of telepathy actually bringing physical destruction was so shocking that she found it kept impinging on her thoughts, and she was forced to make three false starts before she began to make any sort of orderly progress on the problem.

Nampura Depot was primarily a research unit. When the abolishment of the electrophagic aborigines released Martian telepaths from their jobs as planetary communicators, Rolf and other top-level Martian authorities had decided to set up the Depot to enable TP workers to develop their gifts, individually and collectively, in an effort to discover new and advanced uses for their talents.

Thanks to her work as a brain-team coordinator on Earth, Lynne had become almost indispensable to the project. For part of her education had entailed a thorough grounding in the theory of relays and relay hookup alignments which was the basis of all computer-work on the mother planet. Every computer was a relay of calculators, aligned according to their nature in relation to the problem which was to be solved. It was the same with the human teams, or relays, which supplemented and complemented the work of the computers on Earth.

On Mars, where heavy and complex computer machinery was as rare as it was unneeded, Lynne's training and knowledge had proved invaluable. As Rolf had told her, shortly after the project was commenced, "Sure, we're all bright enough here. We *farbly* well have to be. But you have the teamwork integration picture imbedded in that *zwirchy* little head of yours. You can put two and two together and get ninety."

The trouble was, she had been putting two and two together by testing first this pair, then that, in every conceivable combination of telepathic teamwork, and she had been getting precisely nowhere.

For a while, it had seemed exciting to be able, working in proper tandem, to receive and probe minds on Earth, some forty million miles away. But when Lynne discovered that many of her teams were amusing themselves by tapping the pleasure-houses for their own ribald entertainment, she had asked Rolf to put a stop to that branch of the project—although she suspected the ban was far from totally effective.

She had, gradually, come to type telepaths much as blood donors had once been typed on the mother planet. There were three basic types of telepaths: A—those who could *receive* mental messages as delivered from all directions and distances, B—those who could not only *receive* but grade the thoughts that came to them directionally and tune in or out selected thought waves as

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they chose, and, C—those who were capable of *projecting* their own thoughts and impulses into the minds of others and possessed as well the capabilities of groups A and B.

A types were almost a norm on Mars, Lynne had learned. In the sympathetic environment of the Red Planet, latent telepathy was at least faintly active in eight out of ten Earthfolk. The B's were less common—only about three in a thousand Martians could *tune* the messages their minds received. And only one in a hundred thousand was a C type.

All in all, there were two hundred and seventeen telepaths at the Depot—two hundred and sixteen now that Juan Olsen was dead—and the variations among them was what complicated the problem. Curiously enough, the A's could *receive* from the greatest distances, even though they couldn't *tune* the messages unaided. But a B, linked with an A, could tune in from a further distance than a B working alone. Similarly, a C lined up with an A, could broadcast almost infinitely. On record was one contact with a spaceship far out beyond Pluto's orbit.

But human contacts were not the main purpose of the Depot. What the investigators were seeking was contact with alien life-forms, either on, or beyond Mars. If telepaths had been able to make contact with the aborigines that had so nearly destroyed them, it seemed reasonable to suppose that they should be able to make contact with other alien intellects.

Apparently, judging by what had happened, they had done so. But what monstrous life-form had they contacted—and where was it located?

For more than a Martian month, Lynne had been aware of a force—strangely stimulating—lurking just beyond range of her probing. She had, on two occasions, felt a sudden surge of power while working with Revere or one of the others, a power that flared up and faded quickly, leaving irritation in its wake.

There had been a restlessness in the Depot atmosphere, a restlessness that had shown itself in such lapses as poor Rana's childish drawing in the folio. Other C types had reverted now and then to basic nature—to ill-temper, to ridiculous practical jokes, to fits of melancholy, even to overindulgence in lichenwasser.

"Angel, how about a drink? You've been sitting in a brown study for two hours now—and the color scheme of this room is baby-blue." It was Tony, bless him, bringing her out of it.

Involuntarily Lynne began to shake her head in refusal, telling herself that Tony had chosen a very poor time to urge indulgence in lichenwasser. Then it occurred to her that her recent primness might have had something to do with the mysterious restlessness that seemed

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to be affecting all the members of the Depot.

She said, "All right, Tony," and drained the plastic tumbler. With the warmth of the drink she felt a soaring triumph. She was sure now that she had solved the problem of what was happening to the personalities of Nampura Depot. They *were* in contact with some alien intellect, or mind, or personal force that reduced their complex human impulses to a few basic impulses and to basic impulse fulfillment. She said, "Tony, have you noticed anything peculiar going on around the Depot the last few weeks?"

He thought it over, then nodded. "Two or three times I considered inveigling you into the supply room and making violent love to you, Lynne. I've had the impulse ever since I first met you at the New Samarkand Spaceport. But, *Crehut,* it was never like this."

"Give me another," said Lynne, holding out her tumbler. "I forgive you for your candor. We should have kept behavior charts on everybody here, instead of just on the experiments. You'd better get psycho on it tomorrow, Tony. I've a feeling we're in contact with that alien mind-force we've been looking for, and that it's making like a psychological poltergeist."

"It's just barely possible." Tony looked thoughtful behind his spectacles. Then he said, "But if you're right, and if Juan and Rana actually found it, *it can kill.*"

Lynne looked somberly at the lichenwasser in her plastic tumbler. Then she said, "Yes, it can kill," and drained it.

III

Lynne and Tony Willis were still discussing the problem when a somewhat haggard Rolf Marcein came in. Characteristically, he gave them no more than a perfunctory personal greeting. "I hopped the first transport after I got the flash, Tony. Lynne, what have you managed to find out about this ghastly mess?"

"Nothing for the record yet," Lynne told him, admiring and detesting simultaneously Rolf's ability to dismiss all other relationships when a work problem arose. "But I've got a pattern of sorts."

"All right. Let's hear it."

She went on to tell him, as concisely as she could, what she had figured out since her arrival. Rolf listened attentively, without comment, until she had finished. Then he frowned.

"Tony, tell operations to set up the necro-recorder with the new psycho-muffler attached," he said quietly. "We're going to have to probe Rana's mind while she's still in shock. Otherwise, some of these Navajos will be trying their own *farbish* experiments—and we may have a lot more corpses to worry about, or something even worse."

"Sure you feel up to it, chief?" Tony asked as he flipped a switch

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on his desk, preparatory to giving the orders.

Rolf grunted and rubbed a hand across his brow. Lynne offered him a tumbler of lichenwasser, but he shuddered and turned away from her.

"You *marlet!*" he said rudely. "Can't you be serious for once?"

Lynne repressed a smile. She had not had a hangover since one school holiday, when she had consumed an entire bottle of crême de menthe alone in a hotel room on Earth—but thanks to their telepathic rapport she knew how Rolf felt. Furthermore, in view of her discovery, she understood what had happened to make him so boisterously uninhibited of late, just as she understood her own increased primness. Both of them had been in telepathic relay contact with the mysterious new entity that had caused the restlessness at Nampura Depot and, ultimately, had killed Juan Olsen.

Although Lynne had been in spasmodic telepathic touch with her twin brother, Revere, when the necro-recorder was used on him, shortly after her arrival on Mars, it was the first time she had been present at an actual demonstration of the dangerous instrument that had, until the psycho-muffler was discovered, either killed or driven permanently insane the persons on whom it had been employed.

Its original purpose had been to present visualization, as on an old-fashioned colored television screen, of the thoughts of a man or woman about to die—to reveal them and make it possible to record them. In bygone years it had been a police-force stand-by, one of the miracle gadgets that had all but wiped out crime on Earth and Mars.

She sat in a chair against a wall of the infirmary operating room, while the unconscious Indo-Italian was wheeled in on an operating wagon, her dusky face ash-white above the cloth that covered the pronounced curves of her tiny body. She watched while Rolf, abetted by the Depot practitioner, deftly applied the electrodes behind the girl's ears, just over the sensitive mastoid areas, and then went to the grid-screen tuner and said to the practitioner, "Ready, Hambri?"

"Ready, Rolf," said the practitioner quietly. "Try to tune fast. This girl is in a dangerous state of shock and we don't want to expose her to any needless added risks."

"We don't want to—but we have to," said Rolf grimly. Watching him, Lynne felt her fingernails dig into the palms of her hands. She was in perfect telepathic rapport with him and understood the tension, the very real emotional concern and sense of responsibility toward the girl that underlay his ruthlessness. And she knew she had never before understood or loved him so deeply and well.

Almost before she had savored the thought, the grid-screen was flashing a kaleidoscope of wild color. Purples, deep reds, turquoise

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blues, ivory, yellows, rolled aimlessly around the screen, superseding one another in erratic sequence. Rolf cursed and worked with the tuner but only the vaguest shapes emerged. Lynne felt herself grow taut.

Then, suddenly, she was in touch not only with Rolf but with the buried thoughts in the unconscious girl's mind, as released through the necro-recorder. Inexplicably, she understood the machine itself. She flashed a *steady the horizontal—give the vertical another turn,* and was rewarded when Rolf flashed her a silent *thanks,* VINRAL in return. Quickly he obeyed her thought-order and the screen flickered to clarity.

There were the two of them—Rana and Juan Olsen, sitting side by side, working in telepathic tandem in the blasted Rec Room. She felt the urgent excitement that had gripped them course through her. The room faded and again there was confusion—but this time it was in Rana's and Juan's thoughts, rather than in the machine.

There were pictures of love-making, of birth, of pain, of spiritual worship of a God that blurred between a celestial image and that of an eight-armed Hindu God. It was amazing, Lynne thought vagrantly, how the supposedly long-buried religious symbols survived, leaving a technically enlightened humanity chained to the creations of its own early priesthoods. She felt a surge of such primitive belief herself.

They were in touch with something, through the mind of the unconscious girl, but what? Lynne glanced at Rolf, and saw that beads of sweat were studding his brow as he pondered the visual-grid. Then, suddenly, they were following the trail of a skyrocket through space—a rocket that sped endlessly out against the dusty brilliance of the Milky Way to a spot on a suddenly expanding globe, whose sky was blazoned with the bulk of a monstrous cloudy planet, like an immense bladder that filled the very heavens themselves.

Lynne was about to cry out with fear when she saw the immense red lozenge high up on the curve of the huge world and heard herself cry aloud, *"Jupiter!* It comes from one of the moons of Jupiter!"

"Callisto," said Rolf. The screen went blank and he flicked it off. Moments later, the girl was wheeled from the room by an anxious orderly, with the practitioner in watchful attendance. Rolf put the necro-recorder on *rerun* and played it back. When it was finished, he turned to Lynne and said, *"Vinral,* think you can be packed in an hour? We're going out there and run this down."

Lynne was horrified. She cried, "But, Rolf, darling—we can't go to Callisto. All traffic to the Jovian moons is strictly under Earth Interplanetary Administration. They aren't open to other traffic yet."

"*Ferkab* the E.I.A.," said Rolf rudely. His dark eyes blazed as

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they glared at her. "We're going out there. At any rate, *I* am. If you think I'm going to sit around and wait while a lot of red tape is unwound and maybe some more of us get killed, you're full of *purt.*"

Lynne's own reaction told the story. Even by coming in second-hand contact with the alien mind, they were reverting to their inner natures. She had turned into the convention-bound Earthwoman while Rolf, more than ever, was the determinedly reckless authority-hating man of Mars. But even awareness of the cause of their behavior was of little help.

She forced herself to say, "Very well, Rolf, I'll go to Callisto with you, but not until we're provisionally married."

Rolf said, "*Crehut, vinral,* how simple can you get? I've got news for you. We were married this afternoon at the weddings, when I had you sign the second book. Remember?" And, when she stared at him, stunned, "What did you think we were doing — playing moon-snaffle?"

Lynne felt as if she had been turned into some gelatinous substance, and dipped in a quick-freeze. She could barely manage to telepathize, much less speak. She thought, *And I suppose you think that makes everything intimately uninhibited between us?*

He was still playing the insensitive goon as he flashed back, *Well, it certainly makes everything legal.*

Lynne's chill melted in the sudden heat of her anger. She sent a bludgeoning stream of fierce thoughts at him, attacking his crude concept of marriage, the travesty of the entire Martian mating system, the antique crudity of the accompanying drunken parties, overwhelming his desperate efforts to temper her wrath.

It was a great fight while it lasted—but it didn't last long. Rolf simply lifted Lynne off her feet with one arm, pinioning her while he sealed her mouth with the other. "Okay—but shut up, little wife," he said, "or I'll take off on my own. And you wouldn't want that—remember, I can read your mind as easily as you can read mine." He deliberately broadcast a detailed vision of what he intended to do to her once they were alone in the privacy of the spaceship.

Lynne flashed back a vision of what she intended to do to him if he tried anything of the sort and, moments later, they were glaring at each other in a sort of uneasy armed truce. Lynne found herself seething with a hatred she had never believed herself capable of feeling toward any living creature.

Then, silently, she prepared herself for the journey ahead. Mostly, it was a matter of arranging for records to be kept properly during her absence. There was nothing to pack—not for an interplanetary journey in a two-man triple-drive.

As she stepped uneasily aboard, she saw that Rolf had been deceiving her with his thoughts of a

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sybaritic interior. Instead of the pneumatic couches with cushions and soft carpets, instead even of the limited creature comforts of the big liner that had brought her to Mars, Lynne found herself in a tiny, cluttered cabin, surrounded by an incredible complex of instrument boards and machinery.

Frightened, she protested, "But what if something happens to you, Rolf? How am I supposed to run all this mixed-up machinery?"

"Use your woman's intuition," he growled at her. "And keep the monkey wrench away from my ear." But his thoughts revealed reassuring pictures of IBM hookups working smoothly and automatically, with the gauges and other indicators and buttons, merely for emergency use.

She sent him a silent okay, then said, horrified, "What's that?"

"That," came Rolf's answering thought, "is the plumbing."

Thus, he confirmed her worst fears. *It* was amazingly, appallingly open, occupying as it did almost the center of the floor. Her thought was one of horror—*I couldn't possibly. It's too undignified.*

To which Rolf, busily preparing for takeoff, flashed back, *So what, you little prig? We're married aren't we?*

In name only, she replied. *That was a real* MARLET *trick. Wait till we get back! I'll have it wiped off the books.*

"Meanwhile," he reminded her aloud, "it's a long way to Callisto—and back. You're caught fair and square, *vinral,* so why not enjoy it?" He had the further ill-grace to laugh in her face as words failed her and she sank down with a desparing sob.

Minutes later, they were off on their unauthorized trip—and Lynne forgot her anger and outrage at Rolf's casual male high-handedness long enough to feel terror as her Earth-conditioning reasserted itself. This was no space-liner she had embarked in, no interplanetary hotel with its staff of experts and countless safety devices.

This was a two-place interplanetary spanner; a sort of hot-rod, a tiny non-seagoing submarine that was little more than an atomic power plant with operating instruments and a tiny cockpit stuck on top of it. She felt right out among the stars, even though vision-screens showing television pictures of their surroundings were the only instruments through which she could see out.

By the chronometer high on the instrument board, it took them exactly nine days, eleven hours and twenty-six minutes to cover the 360,000,000-odd miles between Mars and Callisto, but to Lynne the journey seemed to last a tedious forever. And, from the thoughts that occasionally leaked through Rolf's tight guard, she gathered it seemed even longer to him. She wanted him to suffer and she made him suffer.

It became a sort of game. She

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would appear to relent for a while, and listen to him quite seriously. Then, when he would take her outer friendliness for encouragement, she would pull the switch and freeze him colder than Callisto itself. On the seventh day out, she found herself thinking, *I never knew I could be such a heel. I guess love can turn any girl into a witch at times.*

Rolf's quick answering thought, *Let's face it, Lynne, you mean all the time, don't you?* served only to stiffen her wavering resolve to make him pay through his aquiline nose for this second trick he had pulled on her. Of course she intended to marry him—but not by any such drunken, underhanded ruse as he had used on her. Nor did she intend to let him get away with it. *The marlet!*

His snicker at her thoughts did little to improve her temper.

Then Jupiter loomed up, increasingly, ominously, in the bow vision screen and, faced with the problem of tracking Callisto and making a landing in the proper location, Rolf forgot his outraged ego and concentrated on bringing the tiny spaceship in safely. Lynne, who admired his rough-hewn efficiency, watched him in adoration, some of which much have seeped through to warm his frozen id.

Once Rolf said, "A good thing this entity or whatever it is we're following seems to be located almost on top of the Earth Interplanetary Administration outpost. This is supposed to be a frozen hellhole." He added a silent, *You should feel right at home there, enchilada,* and anger once more reigned voiceless but supreme in the little ship.

But the terrifying splendor of Jupiter, seen from such close range, caused them again to forget their puny problems. Its sulphurous yellow cloud envelope was almost blindingly bright until, mercifully, they skirted its twilight edge and emerged into shadow, lit only by the large inner moons, Io, Europa, Ganymede and Callisto, the last two of them larger than the planet Mercury. A dazzling spectacle.

Then the frozen sweeps of Callisto were flattening out beneath them, its frozen air lying in great white drifts in the Moonlike chasms between the jagged peaks that splintered the horizon on every hand. It was, Lynne thought, the most desolate sight she had ever seen. She turned away, shuddering, form the screen, only to be recalled by an urgent thought-summons from Rolf.

They were over one of the satellite's few comparatively level surface areas—and approximately in its center was an unmistakable Earthmen's camp—or what had been an Earthmen's camp! It looked as if it had been flattened out by a tremendous blow with the heel of some giant hand. Only a pair of spaceships, sheltered behind a natural craggy embankment, seemed to have survived intact. And on the

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frozen air of the planet, close alongside the desolation, the letters SOS were spelled out with empty fuel tins.

"Looks as though maybe I followed the right hunch coming out here after all—with or without E.I.A. authorization," said Rolf.

Lynne said nothing—she was too scared to talk.

IV

Rolf turned, tight-lipped, from the communicator panel and said, "*Crehut,* a video white-out. They're either cripped or dead!"

Lynne said, "What are you going to do?" In the confusion of bringing the ship in, she was unable to sort out the mental messages she was receiving. But she got a wild impression of thoughts and emotions, transcending anything human. It was like being inside some immeasurably vast, utterly lunatic cathedral.

"I'm going to land right beside those other ships—if I don't go crazy first," said Rolf. He had to speak aloud, just as Lynne did, because in the turmoil of telepathic disturbance it was impossible to select and tune personal thoughts.

It was a rocky landing, since the apparently level ground proved to be dangerously uneven as they settled down upon it. But although the ship rocked in heart-stopping fashion, he finally got it steady on its pintels and mopped sweat from his brow. For a long moment, he sat before the control panel, letting the strain leave him.

With the thrum of the engines silent, Lynne became aware of another steady pulse of power—unheard, for its pitch was far too great for human eardrums. Her mind seemed to burst with visions of the planets, of the stars, of distant nebulae and galaxies, interspersed with unheard paeans of indescribably magnificent music, of concepts of such surpassing beauty, of such dread and terror and love and ugliness and sheer passion that, inevitably, Lynne found herself recalling Mr. Mole, in Kenneth Grahame's archaic but still-loved *Wind in the Willows,* when that little animal heard the magic Pipes of Pan and found their song beyond his limited ken.

"I must be mad," she told Rolf.

He said, "You and I both, *vinral.* But if we both get it, we must be sane. What in *purt* do you suppose it is?"

Lynne tried to put it into words. "It's like—like—It's far beyond anything we've ever encountered."

Rolf got up and told her, "Come on—let's find out what's going on. This is like being caught inside an old-fashioned circus calliope going full blast."

He crossed the tiny cabin, almost floating in the light gravity of the satellite, opened a locker and got a couple of heavy-duty space-suits. It was the first time Lynne had seen such an outfit save in vidar entertainments and, by the time Rolf had

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locked her into it, she felt like a cross between an Egyptian mummy and a deep-sea diver of several centuries before. It was hot and her nose itched and there was no way to scratch it. But the heavy composition of the suit mercifully blacked out some of the radiant alien messages that had been overwhelming her thoughts.

They rode lightly to the surface on the external elevator, and Lynne's impression of appalling desolation was reinforced when she looked at the scenery about her from ground-level. Callisto was a nightmare moon for anyone conditioned to the inner planets. The great curving bulk of Jupiter was shadowed but light reflected from its large inner moons made its appalling, ominous immensity all too evident. It looked as if it were going to fall on her and crush her to death.

A couple of heavy-space-suited figures emerged from one of the two big ships a half kilometer away and slowly descended on an exterior elevator. Rolf, speaking into his suit-mike, said, "Hello there —are you from Earth?"

Lynne staggered under the force of a mental blow that threatened to black her out as Rolf spoke. From the plain beyond the shelter of the rock revetment behind which they had landed, came a sudden lavender flash, followed by a rolling roar. The two space-suited figures beckoned to them and she found herself running clumsily toward them. Moments later, they were being taken aboard the larger ship.

Inside, in the compression chamber, suits were removed and a coarse-haired, pale-faced, young-old man said, "Welcome to headache satellite. I'm Lieutenant Patrick Suzuki, commandant pro tem of what's left to Callisto Mission. Who are you?"

Rolf explained, adding "I must add that we are unauthorized."

The lieutenant swore amiably, and added, "Never mind the red tape. Thank the gods of my ancestors you're here." He went on to explain that they were completely cut off from communication with the outside. "If we put on any circuit, we draw another blast. One more and the revetment may go and bury us. We can't leave, we can't send for help. We wouldn't dare let anyone else land if we could get to them."

"What's the cause of your trouble?" Lynne asked him, glancing around her at the unshaven faces and informal attire of the Earthmen in the big ship's wardroom, to which they had adjourned after removing their heavy space-suits.

She received impressions of boredom, of controlled fright, of lust toward herself. For the moment, the overpowering entity, whatever it was, was not blanketing all thought, though the pulse of its power never ceased.

Suzuki told them. Callisto had been placed under strict E.I.A. restriction because of the discovery

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upon that satellite, by geologists of the first expedition to reach her, of a rare new element whose properties promised to outdo any of the radioactives.

"It's right out there," he added, gesturing toward the plain. "Right on the surface. We didn't want to risk an interplanetary rush. So E.I.A. sealed off the satellite and sent Callisto Mission out to make further study and begin test mining operations."

Listening to him, Lynne wondered why so many otherwise human and reasonably slangy young officials fell into the jabberwocky jargon of government reports once they began discussing their business. It was, she decided, drilled into them during their schooling, a sort of illiterate but precise articulateness.

The element lay over most of the plain, an area of seven square kilometers, much of it right on the surface. It was, Suzuki said, "of a sort of opalescent yellow, soft to the touch despite the cold here. It looked like all we'd have to do was inaugurate operations, take samples and return to home base."

Proceeding methodically under the leadership of Wing Officer Arthur Mitropoulos, Callisto Mission had set up camp on the plane, right over the mine it intended to open. On the "morning" operations were to begin, Sazuki and the maintenance crew had been alerted to stand by to relay messages to base from the ships. Then had come the blast—utterly destroying camp and machinery and all the men in it.

"We tried to send an S.O.S.," he concluded, "and were blasted again. Three more times it happened. So we put out the fuel cans and sat tight. Frankly, we're stumped. We don't know what to do next."

Within the metal skin of the ship, Lynne and Rolf could exchange telepathic messages, but it would be impossible to send one out through space with enough power to reach Mars or any possible rescue ship that might be winging its way toward Callisto. Lynne thought, *What about our suits? They didn't feel like metal.*

Rolf's reply came, *Good* ZWIRCHY *girl! Maybe we can do it.*

When they explained their plan to Suzuki, he shook his head in wonder and said, "I've heard of Martian telepathy but I never thought I'd be using it. Do you think it's safe?"

Rolf said, "We're following up a telepathic disaster on Mars, induced by this super-monster you've found. But as long as we don't beam our thoughts on it, I think we'll be all right. Besides, operating in relay, it's not likely to get both of us."

You hope, Lynne telepathed and received a mental image of fingers firmly crossed.

A half hour later, she and Rolf stood again on the frozen atmosphere of the big satellite. Again

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Lynne's nose itched infuriatingly, but this time she soon forgot her discomfort and she and Rolf linked minds and began sending to Nampura Depot. Around them, the appalling crescendo of unearthly thoughts and dreams rolled disturbingly, making concentration next to impossible.

They tried and failed, then tried again—and again. And, finally, they got *Nampura Depot, Mars, Fenlay. Who are you?*

Callisto Mission calling, Marcein and Fenlay. Hello Revere.

They were through—and without being blasted. Rolf gave Lynne's telepathic twin brother the message, stating the conditions on the satellite and asking that rescue ships stand clear until the situation was remedied. He concluded with, *Relay to E.I.A. Headquarters. And stand by for further messages.*

Signing off, Revere sent a, *Luck, Lynne—and Rolf. We'll be here, standing by. Over and out.*

They went back to Suzuki's ship, lest further message sending cause another blast. There, Lynne telepathed Rolf, *Did you feel it—something else, something not alien?*

CREHUT, *now that you mention it.* Rolf turned to Suzuki, said, "Did any of your power instruments survive the blast, Lieutenant?"

Suzuki looked at one of his technicians, a bearded, copper-skinned man called MacDougald. Macdougald scratched his head and said, "I don't see how—unless the Sodium generator escaped. They buried it pretty deep. And they must have had it on. And once it's on, nothing but a flip of the switch will turn it off for centuries."

"Why do you ask?" Suzuki wanted to know.

Rolf and Lynne exchanged quick thoughts and Rolf said, "Because both of us received an impression that this element—this alien force—is suffering an unbearable irritation, which is amplified whenever any sort of power is turned on nearby. It's—well, it reminds us of some sort of vegetable poisoning that can be stepped up to agony."

"We've got plenty of vegetable poisoning on Callisto, unlikely as it sounds," said Suzuki. "The verdant stuff is latent all over the place. Goldberg nearly died of it." He nodded toward a red-headed man whose forearms were swathed in plastibands. "The heat of our operations restored some of the stuff to virulence."

"Preventive shots no good?" Lynne asked sympathetically.

Goldberg said, "They worked for the others, but not for me. It's the worst itch I've ever had." He winced.

Rolf brought the conversation back on the beam. He said, "This element you've discovered is definitely superhuman mentally and emotionally. And it can and does kill when irritated. The picture we get is that here on Callisto it's been left exposed on the surface and is sensitive to certain irritations. If your Sodium generator is an irri-

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tation, it's got to be turned off before any of us can leave or any relief ship can land safely. Let me see a plan of the generator."

What do you mean—here on Callisto? Lynne telepathed. *Do you think it exists anywhere else?*

I don't know—and don't bother me, was the reply, as Rolf bent over the blueprint MacDougald produced from a cupboard. He scanned it, scowling, then flashed a picture to Lynne, showing the generator, where it was buried, where the switch was that alone could turn it off. *Lynne, do you feel strong enough to try it?* he asked silently.

Lynne knew what he meant. On Earth, with its dense atmosphere and metallic atmosphere vapors telepathy was almost unknown. On Mars, where the air was thinner and purer, it flourished but other telekinetic powers were weak and incapable of being controlled. Here on Callisto, with no atmosphere save what was frozen solid underfoot, there was just a chance . . . Perhaps, if they worked together, they could exert sufficient psychic power to turn the switch and put the super-entity out of its misery.

Why doesn't it turn the FARBISH *thing off itself?* Lynne telepathed.

Did you ever hear of any creature, however advanced, removing an alien object from its own brain? was the quick response. And somehow Lynne knew Rolf was right. It was going to be up to them.

We'll have to keep cover behind the revetment, she replied, *in case we fumble at first and our friend starts blasting again.*

Rolf asked that they be left alone in the compression chamber for a bit. And there they practiced on small objects—a stencil-recorder, a gravity-weight, a set of earphones. It was the hardest kind of work but, even within the metal shell of the ship, they were able at first, by linking up in the tightest of combinations and willing as one, to move aimlessly, then to attain control over the objects and move them about at will, even to lift them briefly from the deck.

Exhausted, they rested, sitting close together on the floor of the chamber, their backs against the wall. And Rolf said, "We've got to do a lot better before we can risk a real trial. If we're wrong—or if we make a mistake . . ." He let it hang there.

Lynne nodded. Like him, she was too mentally exhausted for telepathy. She said, "I wish I weren't telepathic. I wish nobody were telepathic. Then none of this would have happened."

He nodded and told her, "I suppose Columbus wished he'd never tired to cross the Atlantic when his men threatened mutiny. I suppose Henry Condon felt the same way when his spaceship broke down on the first trip to the Moon. I *know* we've all felt that way at times on Mars when things looked bad. But feeling that way isn't going to save those poor devils upstairs. And it won't get us off Callisto."

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"I know," she said with an attempt at a smile. "Let's go on up and tell them we're making progress."

As Rolf helped Lynne to her feet, he said, "Actually, you know, we've done amazingly well."

Lynne lost track of time as she and Rolf slept and practiced, slept and practiced, sheltered from the wrath of the strange entity beyond the rock revetment by the metal skin of the E.I.A. ship. At times, especially when she was tired or distracted, it seemed as if they were never going to master telekinesis at a distance. Staying in the ship, they were sorely limited. But they dared not test outside lest their efforts add to the entity's irritation and cause it to strike back with renewed fury.

They did not even dare risk another message to Mars.

Finally, when Lynne found herself able to move objects about in the control cabin, abetted by Rolf's mind-power, she said, "Well, what do you think?"

Rolf nodded and directed a thought at her. *It's got to be after our next rest period,* VINRAL. *We can't just sit here forever.*

Upstairs, in the cabin, they worked out final plans with Suzuki. He and Goldberg and half the crew were to stay put, while MacDougald and the rest of the E.I.A. survivors were to move to the other expeditionary ship.

"That way," Rolf suggested, "your chances of getting one ship back will be doubled in case something goes wrong."

"Got you," said Suzuki matter-of-factly. "Here, have some of the panktosteak. Cook's outdone himself on the sauce."

The atmosphere as they ate what might be their their final meal together was almost gay. After the long period of inactive confinement, the E.I.A. men were welcoming the prospect of a change of condition—even if the change were death. Reading their thoughts, Lynne felt proud to be a human. She had never quite believed in heroes before—they had seemed buried so far back in a pre-scientific human past—yet here she was, with a whole group of them.

Rolf's thought reached her. *You're not doing so badly yourself,* VINRAL—and she turned her face toward the wall as her cheeks grew hot.

To her surprise, she slept, and dreamt she was back on Earth, working at the brain-station with her teammates. And then Rolf was awakening her and, after a silent handshake with Suzuki, she was clambering into a heavy space-suit once more. Then, again, she and Rolf were treading on frozen atmosphere, the two of them alone this time, moving slowly along the base of the jagged revetment until they were a good kilometer away from the other ships. Again Lynne's nose itched unbearably, and this time the itching seemed to be spreading, to include other parts of her body.

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She had to force herself to ignore it completely.

Good girl! Rolf approved her effort. *Here, I think we've gone far enough. Here goes . . .*

They stood clear of the gaunt rock wall, against the chance of falling fragments, and Lynne looked at the twin tall spires of the E.I.A. ships and at the shorter, stubbier vessel, a half-kilometer beyond them. Then they put their minds as one on the Sodium generator, lying beneath the surface of the plain amid the flattened E.I.A. sheds.

They concentrated with all of their newly-awakened telekinetic power on the switch a few centimeters to the left of the main control panel. And they thought fiercely. Lynne could feel a gathering storm of alien irritation. Thoughts of cathedrals were replaced by hideous concepts of suns exploding into novae, of planets burning to ash.

Then Lynne felt the switch move slightly under the force of the mental shaft she and Rolf were directing upon it. Instantly, she almost blacked out under the countering wave of black anguish that threatened to blanket her thoughts. She wavered, felt for Rolf's mind, found it. She drew strength from it, felt it push with hers against the switch, felt the switch move further, further, then all the way to *off*—just as a tremendous blast of leviathan outrage knocked her flat on the frozen atmosphere while the rim of the revetment above was seared and shattered by an appalling blast of purple power.

Then the mental pressure was gone, and the pulsing retreated to a soft throb that was almost a purr. There was no gratitude. The entity, whatever it was, had far outgrown such puerile emotion. But the physical turmoil its reaction had created was far from over.

Even as Lynne watched, the rock revetment crumbled from the force of the blow it had received. She felt mounting horror as huge pieces of rock broke off in a mounting torrent that fell without sound in the airless void about them. She saw one of the E.I.A. ships struck and sent toppling on its side, the other's nose shattered by a grey, wedgelike piece of stone.

Then she and Rolfe were tumbling, leaping toward the ships. It was a time of terror, though the source of the terror was under control once more. Frantically, they tugged at the rocks about the toppled ship, seeking to clear the emergency doorway. *Poor Suzuki! Poor Goldberg!* she thought and Rolf's thoughts seconded hers.

"Here—let us use the instruments." The voice came through the earphones, not her mind. Shaken, she looked around to see a trio of space-suited figures behind her, carrying odd-looking instruments. It was MacDougald and the crew of the other E.I.A. ship.

A half-hour, Mars-time, and they had cut their way into the toppled ship. Lynne had to fight against be-

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ing physically sick inside her space-suit at what they found. Suzuki and his four-man crew were dead. The ship had been splintered as she fell and their bodies had burst in the airlessness.

When the mess had been cleaned up and they were back at the other E.I.A. ship, MacDougald revealed his Gaelic practicality when he told them, "You did a good job—you licked it. I'm sorry about Suzuki, but he knew what the odds were. We all do. I had one of the men look at your little ship and she's all right. You'd better be getting the lady back to Mars, Mr. Marcein."

"But what about you? This ship of yours is in no shape to take off," Rolf protested.

"Thanks to you, help is on the way," said MacDougald. Then, eyeing Lynne keenly, "You'd better get the lady off Callisto."

V

It had never occured to Lynne, in her wildest imaginings during the trip out to Callisto, that the little spaceship which had brought them, with its cramped cockpit and utterly inside plumbing, would feel like home. But once she and Rolf were in it together, on their way back to Mars, she curled up beside him in the warmth of the tiny cabin, grateful for the artificial gravity, feeling utterly relaxed, and basked in the warth of his thoughts toward her.

Still sore at me, VINRAL*?* he telepathed.

Of course not, you FARBISH *idiot,* she replied silently.

He turned her around on the narrow, curving couch, so that she was facing him, in his arms, with her face close to his. She thought, *My husband! Maybe there are more important things than a ceremony.*

You're so right, my VINRAL, came his answering thought. And then, as a flicker of concern crossed his powerful features, *You're not seriously ill, are you,* VINRAL?

MARLET, she reproved him fondly, *I never felt better in my life. Just being alive—and off Callisto!*

But your face — your arms — they're all broken out!

She looked at her arms and it was so. Blisters—ugly, yellowish blisters—seemed to be rising on her skin even as she watched. She felt a thrill of panic that made her shudder. And then, as if waiting for a signal, the itching began. It started on her face, flowed through her arms, through her body, her legs, her feet.

Goldberg's poisoning! You poor ZWIRCHY VINRAL! His thought was clear and alarmed. Somewhere, somehow, on the frozen satellite, she had picked up the virulent vegetable poison. As she stripped and let Rolf daub her all over with antiseptic that gave only momentary and partial relief, an ancient song kept running through her head, a centuries-old lilt that went, *A fine*

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romance, with no kisses—a fine romance, my dear, this is . . . And then she thought, *Poor Goldberg, poor Suzuki, poor . . .*

Thereafter, until a day before they landed back at Nampura Depot, Lynne was too sick to remember much of anything. The blisters broke and, with them, the fever that had made her delirious. But when they came away they took patches of skin with them, leaving her too miserable to move. Nor was her misery lessened by recollection that it was she who had spoiled the honeymoon on the outward voyage through injured vanity at her provisional husband's high-handed behavior. As if, when you loved a man, it made any difference *how* you got married . . .

Contact with the infinite, with the immensity of the alien intellect, had considerably widened her vision —even while Goldberg's poisoning had severely limited her sphere of physical action.

Revere came to visit her in the infirmary, which she shared with a convalescent Rana, and told her, telepathically, *You know, you and Rolf are both up for E.I.A. gonging. Officially, you violated a security regulation, but since you saved what was left of Callisto Mission, they're going to slip you a citation under the table.*

At the moment, I couldn't care less, Lynne replied. *What do you hear from Lei on Earth?*

Revere's bride, she learned, was doing fabulously well and a successful, uninduced twin birth was prophesied by the doctors. Lynne felt a flash of pride for both of them, as well as a flash of envy. By the time she and Rolf got around to having babies, she surmised, they'd both be candidates for the geriatrics bureau. Discouraging thought. But she kept it from Revere. He was too happy for sadness.

When he had gone, she shared a skinless gasper with the tiny dark-skinned Rana and asked her about the fatal experiment that had put her into coma. After all, the necro-recorder could only take down thoughts over a very limited period of its subject's mental activity.

Rana told her, talking aloud, since she was still forbidden to overuse her telepathic qualities. She said, "I know now it was wrong, of course, but we were filled with the excitement of discovery. I don't understand why you and Rolf went to Callisto. We beamed our relay-thinking right here on Mars, somewhere in the Syrtis Major prairie, near Woomera Station. At first it was like being in some incredible temple. It was vast and awe-inspiring and—Lynne, I can't really describe it."

"I know," said Lynne. "What turned it sour?"

"That," said the dark girl, "is what I don't understand. We were receiving wonderful stuff—sort of soul-healing. But when Juan flicked on the recorder to take it down it vanished.

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Lynne probed the girl's thoughts and found she was holding nothing back. She was heartsick at the tragic result, for her companion, of an experiment for which she felt herself responsible. Lynne lay back and did some thinking while the dark girl slept and had reached a number of conclusions by the time Rolf appeared that afternoon.

He, it seemed, had been terribly busy since their return to the Red Planet. All sorts of crises had come or were coming to a head. There had been a localized reappearance of the disembodied aborigines that had for so long threatened all communications on Mars—and a campaign had had to be organized to exterminate them.

There had been a squabble over efficiency credits between the communications crews of New Walla Walla and Cathayville which had had to be settled. Earth Interplanetary Authority was anxious for Rolf and Lynne to visit their Rio di Janeiro Headquarters as soon as possible to discuss the ramifications of the Callisto incident. And the problem of decreasing moisture in the Martian atmosphere table was becoming critical.

Which is why I have not been able to stay here at your side, VINRAL, he told Lynne silently. *And now, I must leave you again.*

Oh, Rolf! Lynne was desolate. *I have so much to tell you. I think I'm beginning to understand a little about our—entity.*

Hold it, VINRAL, was the reply. *Right now, I haven't even the farbish time to give it a thought. It will keep till I get back from New Samarkand. I've got to address a council meeting there tonight.*

And he was gone. Resentfully, Lynne thought she might as well have gotten herself married to the legendary old-fashioned country general practitioner of nineteenth century America. She eyed her messed-up face in a hand mirror and wondered when, if ever, she was going to look like herself again. Goldberg's poison! Poor Goldberg . . .

The next day, with Rolf still in New Samarkand, she had the practitioner patch her up and, with the aid of makeup, managed to present a passable front to the world. She had made up her mind to get busy. According to Rana, there might be an entity in the New Woomera district, and New Woomera Station was where Lynne's one-time cabinmate, Joanna, had her home. And Joanna had invited Lynne to pay her a visit at the weddings. Lynne managed to get the use of a somewhat battered runabout and took off from the Depot, shortly before noon.

Mars might be considered a small planet, she thought as she sped low over its level plains and prairies, but it was a planet of vast distances. Without oceans, it actually had a far greater land surface than Earth. And its lack of real mountains added to the illusion of vastness. It was, she thought, like flying

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over an ocean of land. Woomera Station, when she sighted it, looked like a small oblate bit of green and yellow, around a cluster of red-and-white farm structures, stuck like a postage stamp in the middle of an immense envelope.

Yet, as she walked from the landing field, she realized as never before what an imposing plant it was. Here were hundreds of hectares of hydroponic greenhouses, some five square kilometers in all of lush grassland for cattle raising, interspersed with long stretches of barns, barracks and storehouses. Here, wonder of wonders on Mars, was even a small pond where the pigs, long-staple mutton and musk-oxen could drink. Truly a man-made oasis, in the midst of desolation.

The pond was Joanna's special pride and joy. "We just got our atomic transmuter three months ago," she said, "and already it is turning the sand into drinking water for the cattle. Maybe someday, we shall all have swimming pools on Mars, quite as wonderful as those in Joberg or Rio on Earth."

Lynne said, "It's pretty expensive, isn't it? And aren't you afraid that the water may be radioactive and poisonous?"

The girl's face fell. She said, "I guess it *is* expensive. But it's better than draining the atmosphere of moisture. And in time, our scientists will learn to cut the cost drastically."

Lynne read the sternly suppressed lack of assurance in the girl's mind. She had pinned her hopes on the transmuter, which was in truth a remarkable invention for turning dry mineral matter into water. But, as an ex-brain team coordinator, Lynne saw clearly that the expense must outstrip any real benefit which might accrue, except in special isolated instances. She kept her conclusion to herself, however, and said, "I'm awfully glad you asked me to visit you, Joanna. I'm tremendously impressed."

Joanna got a two-place tracto-scooter and took Lynne on a tour of the entire project. She admired the plump hogs and flocks of turkeys, the long-staple sheep and the small, furry musk-oxen, imported to endure the arctic cold of the Martian winters. She admired the artificial drinking pond, where the animals clustered to slake their thirst. Finally she asked, "How do you shield the transmuter?"

Joanna waved toward the northeastern corner of the station. "The transmuter has its own shield on three sides," she explained. "We keep the open side facing away from the station. There are some odd sort of radioactive deposits out that way but our chief figures a bit more radiation isn't going to hurt anything. Come on, I'll show you the out-of-bounds markers. The whole area—about fifty square kilometers—is fenced off. A few years ago, a couple of prospectors went in there to dig. They were never seen again."

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"Let's go," said Lynne a trifle grimly. A distant thrumming inside her head grew more intense as they neared the northeast corner of the grazing grounds. She opened her mind a little—and was once more in an unearthly cathedral, full of dread and love and clamor.

"Let's go back, Joanna," she said tightly. Her nerves were singing like guitar strings and it seemed impossible the black girl shouldn't feel it too. But Joanna's dark face remained amiably impassive. At the Station proper, Lynne said, "I'd like to talk to your chief."

Ultimately, to get him to turn off the transmuter, Lynne had to communicate with Rolf and New Samarkand, and tell him that she had discovered another deposit of the super-entity on Mars. In the end it was Agriculture Boss Radchev who ordered the disconnection. The worst of it was, she could not explain her reasons to Joanna and the Station chief in terms they were capable of understanding.

All the chief said was, "You know, without the pool, the Station will perish. We are no longer allowed to draw the water we need from the atmosphere."

"You keep that transmuter on much longer, and the whole Station will be wiped out—just as Callisto Project was wiped out," Lynne warned. "I'm not trying to wreck you. I'm trying to save your lives."

"I wish I'd never asked you to come here!" Joanna cried passionately. "Why couldn't you have left us alone?"

Relations remained strained until Rolf and Radchev, a swarthy giant with an unexpected, and quite startling shock of corn-white hair, arrived on the scene. A gingerly magnetic-tracer investigation was conducted over the suspected area until the eroded entrance of the narrow mine-shaft the prospectors had sunk was located. Then Rolf and a couple of Station hands, leaving all electronic gadgets turned off, approached via tracto-scooter and went down the shaft. When they got back, Rolf nodded.

"It's sunk a lot deeper under the ground surface here," he said. "I'm becoming convinced there's at least one of them on every stable planet and satellite. In some frightening, inexplicable fashion, they're interrelated—which is why we got sent tracking off to Callisto."

Radchev said, "You think there's one on Earth then?"

Rolf nodded. "Probably buried far underground. The more eroded the area, the closer they lie to the surface. On Callisto, the creature was actually exposed. Here, it's buried just under the subsoil."

"Then why hasn't one been found on Luna?" Radchev asked. "I thought Earth's moon was completely charted for mineral elements."

Rolf hesitated, but Lynne came up with the answer. "I think it's because the creature needs the gaseous elements of an atmosphere to

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survive. The atmosphere is thick on Earth, thin here. On Callisto it lies frozen on the ground. But it's there. The Moon has none—just as Deimos and Phobos have none. We know it doesn't exist on them."

"I think you're right," said Rolf, his face grim. "Somehow, this mysterious entity has to breathe. I have a hunch that otherwise it's nothing more than a sort of superbrain, which has long since surrendered all other physical properties."

"Then," said Redchev, puzzled, "why is it we haven't stumbled across a single one of the creatures. This one must have—"

"It has probably been here forever by our measure of time," Lynne interrupted eagerly. "Can't you see, Mr. Radchev, that it hasn't been discovered sooner because non-telepathic human mental processes were too far below its reception or broadcast level to make contact with it?"

The Agriculture boss shook his massive head. "That won't do, I'm afraid," he said. "The coincidence is too steep. Don't you think it remarkable to put it mildly that, almost to the moment when you discover your new life-form telepathically the non-telepathic E.I.A. should have stumbled into it on Callisto? I tell you—I'm not convinced."

"But you will be!" Lynne persisted. "We know it can be irritated by human physical and mental contact under some conditions, and that when the irritation is sufficient, it strikes back at its tormentor. Think of the unexplained blasts and disasters that have killed men and destroyed their works all through known history. Isn't it possible, even probable, that some of those disasters were caused by our new friend under the stimulation of physical irritation?"

Radchev rumbled like an incipient Krakatoa, then subsided to a querulous, "But if this is so, how are we going to combat it?"

And Rolf and Lynne, thinking in concert, spoke in unison, "We aren't going to try to combat it. We're going to put it to use."

VI

Rolf flew back to Nampura Depot with Lynne in the runabout but they were unable to enjoy their brief respite alone together. In the first place, Lynne was still too severely bruised from her bout with Goldberg's poison to endure an embrace—and in the second, they were too preoccupied with her discovery of the entity and its possible consequences for even the lighter aspects of love-making.

Think we'll ever make it, VINRAL? Rolf projected wryly as the runabout settled down on the fluorescent-lit landing field.

You just wait till I get over this, Lynne replied.

Then they were in the restored Rec Room, with its translucent walls and recorder and amplification de-

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vices and other aids to telepathic relay extension. Revere joined them there, as did Rana, for a long and intensive conference. After all, along with Lynne and Rolf they had had closer contact with the entity than any of the other telepaths in the depot. It was Lynne who summed the problem up for them, speaking aloud for the benefit of the recorder.

"What do we know about E-for-Entity and its properties?" she began quietly. "In the first place, since we have discovered that E exists and have made contact with it, Problem Outpost must be considered a success. It was set up to establish contact with life-forms hitherto unreached by mechanical means of communication. And certainly, we have learned enough to feel certain E is a life-form."

She paused to marshal her thoughts, then went on with, "Admitting that E exists and is a form of life, what do we know of its properties? We know that E exists on both Mars and Callisto and, by inference, on other planets and satellites throughout the universe. We know that its various units are in constant intercommunication with one another and that while it has taken a mineral form, it is highly sentient both mentally and physically.

"We know that it has a definite effect upon humans who attain even remote contact with it through the mind. It has an inhibiting effect upon the control centers of the human mind, causing the man or woman in contact with it to lose self restraint and become in some ways childish. If E effects non-telepaths in a similar way, we have no clear record to prove it. But, in view of human behavior throughout history, there is every reason to suspect that such effects can be ascribed to it.

"We know that E is sensitive to mental suggestion, beamed its way, especially when such suggestion is stepped up by electronic or atomic machines. We know that its sensitivity increases in direct ratio with its physical exposure to such impulses and stimuli. And we know that while E, in effect, seems to be some sort of super-brain in mineral form, it is highly sensitive to physical disturbance, such as attempts to dig into its substance."

She paused again, received encouraging thoughts from the others, and continued. "We know further that when E is irritated beyond endurance, it can and does strike back. To our knowledge, since the inauguration of Problem Outpost, it has killed one telepath, rendered another unconscious, and frustrated all efforts to mine its substance on both Callisto and Mars. It is probable that this killing is neither aggressive nor malicious—that it is rather like an elephant, stepping on an annoying insect."

She hesitated, said, "Well, from here on in, I think we'll do better off the record. We're flying by the seat of our clouts."

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"*Crehut,* Lynne," said her twin brother. "Now that we've uncovered this interplanetary monster, what are we going to do about it? I know, I'm receiving you — so you're going to put it to work. But how do you propose to go about harnessing something we know almost nothing about?"

Rolf said, "Don't be a *czan-worm,* Revere. What do we actually know about electricity? Nothing. Yet men have harnessed and used electricity for centuries. If they hadn't, we'd still be Earthbound. In E, we have the greatest potential power-source in history. Are we going to sit around and call it out of bounds, merely because a few of us have been killed, or may be killed, in the process?"

"Yes," said Rana in her small voice. "But what are we going to do with it? All my impressions were of mighty ideas and themes."

"E is an entity of ideas," said Rolf. "In a way it is like a transmission cable—carrying thousands, perhaps millions, perhaps even more messages both ways from itself to its fellows on other planets and moons. It has the power to put its concepts to the test of reality should such a trifling idea appeal to it—which it probably won't. It is on far too high a plane to care about concrete application."

"And just how are we going to get it to care?" Revere Fenlay lit a skinless gasper and blew a nervous-looking smoke ring.

Lynne said, "Revere, we know one thing—it is suggestible as well as suggesting. Given the elements of an atmosphere to exist in, it lives. We know it is suggestible because, when we irritate it sufficiently, it strikes back. We can make it feel our thoughts and our muscles and our machines, however trivially, however remotely."

"Rather destructively, I fear," said her twin looking doubtful.

"All right," said Lynne. "So all we can arouse is destructive force—but it is a response and a predictable one. Once Ben Franklin proved he could get a response from the lightning, however destructive. He was able to create the lightning rod. And Faraday and the others who put electricity to use were not far behind him."

"All right," said Revere. "I'm convinced. But how in *purt* are we going to get our new friend to say uncle when we want it to?"

Something clicked in Lynne's trained coordinator's brain. She said, mentally scanning the notes and records they had been consulting during the meeting, "Revere—Rolf—Rana—what is the one thing that is common to each of E's destructive retaliations when irritated?"

Rana looked helpless. Revere scowled at the floor, then shrugged and gave up. Rolf studied the opaque ceiling of the Rec Room, then said suddenly, "Maybe this is fresh out of your mind, *vinral,* but as I get it there were two things—a flash of light and an impression

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of enormous, sudden sound. Certainly I got those impressions when we were up against E or his cousin on Callisto. Am I right?"

"How about it?" Lynne asked the other two. Rana, looking scared in retrospect, nodded slowly, and Revere said, "It's on the record."

"Doesn't that particular combination of phenomena remind you of something? No, it wouldn't since you're all Martians. But as an Earthwoman, it makes me think of just one thing—a thunderstorm."

Revere looked incredulous, said, "But that's impossible. There isn't enough atmosphere on Mars yet for any rain, much less for a thunderstorm. And on Callisto, the air is frozen on the ground."

"Just a moment," said Rolf, his dark eyes gleaming. "I think I'm beginning to understand what Mrs. Marcein is driving at." Lynne reacted with a shaft of pure delight to his use of her new name and title, then forced herself to listen attentively as he went on with, "If E has the elements of an atmosphere around him—I call it 'him' by courtesy only—he is capable of transmuting them in any form he wishes for self defence. But, Lynne, there has been no sign of rain with any of E's blasts against his irritators."

"Let an Earth-girl speak on that," said Lynne quietly. "If E can create an atmosphere capable of thunder and lightning, however briefly, that atmosphere must be capable of rain. Our problem is to keep E irritated long enough so rain will fall. Keep him irritated directionally so that he will harm no one and so localized that the area that needs moisture will receive the fruits of E's irritation."

"Crehut!" said Revere. "And how do you propose to do that?"

"By using the same techniques used to harness electricity on Earth," said Lynne. "Relays of batteries using telepathic playbacks for irritants. We can set up such a relay and shield it by placing it underground. We can give it direction by placing it well upwind of Woomera Station. And we can work it by remote video control."

Rolf looked at her and frowned. "Why put it so near the Station?" he asked. Aren't you running the risk of its being damaged if your experiment proves successful, *vinral?"*

Lynne said patiently, "What does Mars need most, and where does Mars need it most? The answers are rain and at Woomera Station. Since there are no hills on Mars, there's no danger of a flash flood. And if it rains too much, we turn our gadget off. Simple?"

"No," said Rolf with a slow smile. "It's *farbishly* complex. But I'll fly to New Samarkand tonight and see what can be done about getting official permission. In the meantime, Lynne, you and Revere and Rana start getting the machinery set up. You have the full resources of the depot at your disposal."

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The next morning, Lynne, Revere, Rana and a volunteer crew of Nampura Depot experts were busily installing the relay circuits Lynne had devised in a block of non-metallic instant-concrete on the far side of a gentle rise some twenty kilometers from E area, northwest of Woomera Station.

Rolf had flashed her message that, though they had as yet no official okay, he had won them sub-rosa permission from Agriculture boss Radchev and other interested authorities to go ahead. Rolf had promised to be there within the hour, when they set the switch that would prove their mastery of E or the reverse.

Lynne had to fight hard to maintain a semblance of assurance as the zero hour approached. She was checking the relays for the irritant playback for the forty-ninth time when a government planetplane, with its blue body and bright red disc markings, circled above them and came in to a smooth landing. When Rolf appeared, followed by Radchev and other high brass, she directed toward him a thought of relief.

Once again, before pressing the switch that would put the new E project into work, she was forced to explain its theory. Weather, a tall human skeleton named Krausemeier, was frankly worried. He said, "What if it works and this artificial storm of yours wipes out the moisture in the atmosphere?"

"It can't, and you know it," Lynne replied promptly and was aghast at her own temerity. "There isn't enough air around Mars right now to create a drizzle—so how can a rainstorm lessen it? It's got to *add* to the moisture if it works at all."

Shaking his head, Weather subsided. There were other arguments and discussions and final check-ups against anything going wrong with the relay. When, at 1131 Mars Time, Lynne pressed the button from the control station, two kilometers away from the power plant, it was almost an anti-climax.

For a long, nervous time, lasting some twenty minutes that seemed to Lynne like as many hours, nothing happened. Then, inside herself, she felt a stirring of angry forces, a gathering tension that rose and rose until it seemed past the breaking point. She gripped Rolf's hand tightly, and he returned the grip. Unease was evident on the faces of Revere and Rana and the other telepaths present from Nampura Station. But the rest—the non-telepathic—merely looked bored or restless or impatient or interested or hopeful as the case might be.

Lynne thought, *it has to work, it has to. I've made no mistake.*

And Rolf returned her thought with, *don't worry,* VINRAL, *it's working. I can feel something happening right now!*

A sudden, long-repressed *aaaaah* rose from a hundred throats as a blaze of light flashed on the horizon. It was followed by another,

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and another, and another, until the sky resembled a vidar-image of one of the ancient atomic-war battles that had so nearly destroyed humanity two centuries earlier. The ground above the spot where the relays were planted in their concrete casing, seemed to shimmer and leap.

And then came the thunderclaps, rolling like drumfire over the flat Martian plain. The air shook around them and their eardrums hurt, even from two kilometers away. But the sky remained its usual dark, undisturbed blue, with the sun small and reddish-hued near the meridian.

"Where's your rain, young lady?" Weather wanted to know.

It was Rana who pointed in the direction of the irritated entity and cried in her small voice, "Look, here it comes."

Again there was a gasp of excitement from the assemblage as a moving barrier appeared, first low against the horizon, then rising higher and higher as it approached. To men and women who had spent all their adult lives under the cloudless Martian sky, it was a miracle—and like all miracles, terrifying.

Lynne could sense the thoughts of panic darting about her. A scientist, checking a barometer to make sure too much moisture was not being drained from the atmosphere, suddenly shouted, "Believe it or not, the moisture-table's rising!"

Panic faded before excitement and delight but Lynne, watching the approaching weather front, its edge ominous with the lightning flickers, felt mounting disquiet. This didn't look like a rainstorm approaching to her. It looked at lot more like . . .

It *was!* As the sun was obscured, the snowflakes fluttered down upon them, first by ones and twos, then by dozens, then in countless armies that blotted out the far horizon. And Lynne laughed, laughed wholeheartedly for the first time since her brother's wedding. She laughed until she cried.

Why hadn't anyone thought of it? Of course, in the chill Martian climate, it would have to be snow, except in the tropics during the height of the brief summer season. But snow was merely crystalized rain and there was sufficient power on Mars to turn it back to water by heating the ground. And once the soil was watered, it would bloom again, as it had not bloomed in millions of years.

The snow fell for a solid hour, piling a good three inches of soft cotton wool on the gaunt ground. Then Lynne, with the agreement of the authorities present, turned off the device. They had harnessed the alien entity, put the superbrain to use for men. It would be irritated, of course, but so superior an entity could neither know nor care about the source of its irritation. It would merely seek to sweep it away—which it could not hope to do, any more than an Earthly elephant could hope to catch a fly.

There followed fervent congratulations and a hurried conference

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of officials, all of them wreathed in smiles at the prospect of employing this unlooked-for source of moisture to speed up the reconstitution of the Red Planet's atmosphere.

Krausemeier, acting as spokesman, called Rolf and Lynne over and said, "The Governing Council of Mars offers you its gratitude, not only for what you have achieved but for the dangers you have undergone in accomplishing this invaluable feat. In view of these factors, we hope you will allow us to offer you a six-month visit to Earth with all expenses paid."

Earth! Lynne's heart sang the word. Her home planet—and six whole months. Yet, as she walked beside Rolf to their ship, she was glad their trip together was to last no longer. Here on Mars, there was so much to be done. And even though they had attained control of a sort over the Entity, it could still kill. Juan, and the prospectors and the dead members of the Callisto expedition proved it. Perhaps it would be wiser if she and Rolf postponed . . .

Rolf cut in on her thoughts with a rude, *stow that bosh! Revere and Tony and some of these other* MARLETS *can carry the ball for a while. You and I,* VINRAL, *we're having ourselves a honeymoon, beginning right now. We're going to live it up—really live it up!*

In sheer jubilation, he did a little skipping dance and, before Lynne could warn him, he slipped in the soft snow and fell. Lynne read the thoughts of the physician who hurried to his aid, even before that worthy opened his mouth to say, "I'm afraid he's broken his leg."

It looked as if the honeymoon would have to wait.

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flight from new mu

by . . . Joe Archibald

Septimus Spink had his own ideas about flying disks. They embraced a haywire recklessness — and a survival capacity second to none.

Interplanetary Press—April 10, 2022. Septimus Spink, sole survivor of the Earthian space ship, XXX, was released by the Metropolita Neuropsychiatorium today pronounced as cured as he ever will be. Despite a series of neurotherapeutic high velocity shock treatments, Spink steadfastly refused to recant one word of the story that sent him to the cuckooery. Interviewed by Mars' leading news analyst, Awon R. Mowow, Spink said he was confident that he would be the first citizen of known planets to reach New Mu.

"I am sure," Spink said, "that the characters who took me out of the XXX were natives of New Wu. Correction. I most likely will be the second Earthian to reach that planet. I will not tell you why as they will fling me right back into Bedlam on my plutonylon rompers."

"You still believe what you said about Subcommander Cquob, Fixius Snark and Quartus Goog?" Mowow asked Spink.

"You can quote me," Spink said forcibly. "They got nicked by a strange rebound of the nick of time.

The time-eroded blurbal bromide: "Thomas X—needs no introduction to our readers" has a vigorously new and forceful pertinence when applied to Joe Archibald. For complete, star-bright veracity is never platitudinous And we venture to predict that if there is a single one of our readers who is not already an incurable Archibaldian-humor addict he'll become one when he reads this rollicking new saga of Septimus Spink, star-treader extraordinary.

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When I left the XXX hanging in space with gravity pulling it at both ends, their space suits were as empty as Senatorial campaign promises. Looks like we'll have to find a citizen named Sir Isaac Neutron. Ha!"

"What are your immediate plans, Spink?" a Venutian viso-newscaster queried, discreetly keeping his distance.

"As definite as a Nougatine's peace proposal." Spink retorted. "You know that the Unigovernment of Earth figures I have not collected all my ids and libidoes yet and so can't be put back in status quo with Space Squadron Spearhead. It is a fine uraniumite kettle of smelts, gentlemen, what with the Nougatines rearmin' again. You know the new Number One here has forgot about defense and has spent most of the budget on research into the metabolism of the organism. They still laugh at flyin' saucers like they did in 1954, but it is too bad Keyhoe ain't alive as I could tell him I rode in one."

Spink hotly denied he had been offered three thousand Unigovernment clams per week for appearing in a Martian Nocturnal torrid spot.

YEAH, THAT'S what the newspapers said. Even in these times they don't print all the truth. They forgot about the strings I pulled with the Metropolita ward heelers, and the writ of habeus corpus. I'm out, even though I am watched as close as the seventh son of a seventh son with a bad case of croup. There is some things I did not tell the Twenty-fourth Estate as according to the records of the Spinks in my hermetically-sealed cylinder they did not breed many idiots.

If a relative of mine got me down here in a flying saucer, I am quite sure the character will decide to pick me up some day. And I'll bet they've already towed the Earthian space pencil, XXX to one of their saucer garages. Well, only time will tell, and I hope it doesn't play me as dirty a trick on me as it did Fixius Snark and Quartus Goog.

Being one of Earth's better known viso-screen hams, I am working at my favorite hobby one day when the Nougats hit Mars with a Pearl Harbor. Three Hydroradiumjets hit a Martian blasting-off station in medium outer space and wash it up faster than the Metropolita Yanks did Cincinnatu's star southpaw in the last Interworld Series. I see and hear Earth brass contact the war lords of Mars and Venus. Even Jupiter is jumping.

"All right, I am grounded," I says. "I am a combo of Section Eight and Four F Minus, and am I blue! I will just put in a supply of popcorn an' beer capsules and watch this on my favorite station. I might even go fission."

Then I hear the voice of Number One Coordinator of Space Strategic Command, Bjaal yelp, "Callin' all space pilots, ready or not. Calling all space pilots. Inner and outer space pilots! Everybody who can

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walk. This also means you, Septimus Spink."

"I will protest!" I yelps. "I am a mental case. I want a space lawyer!"

"All malingerers will be shot at once!" Bjaal says in a pall-bearer's voice. "This is a war of survival. Operation Curtains will go in effect at once."

"I changed my mind," I says and run out of the house. My space suit and hot rocket are in the garage and I am about to open the door when I hear a voice behind me and it is not of this world. I pivot and look at something I didn't believe the first time I saw it.

"Exquobo gritzmo lexiquosoma!"

The face is familiar, especially the nose. The character has two big eyes that bug out like those of a bullfrog with thyroid trouble. His skin is the color of a half ripe lemon. It is the C.O. of the creeps that dragged me out of the XXX! The little antenna on his pear-shaped noggin is making little da-da-dit-dit-da-da-dit sounds.

"You are still out in left field an' I don't understand a word of your gibberish," I says. "Look, git lost, as I have to go to war."

"Jazplosa!" the thing says and his eyes look mad. Six other yellow-pussed characters come from back of the garage and grab me, and not with what you call hands. They have lunch-hooks that are like tendrils from jungle plants and they wrap them around me, pick me up like I am only a marshmallow and lug me off. A few minutes later I see that they have landed the saucer on the flat roof of a French-Venutian hand laundry and it looks like it is made of aluminum as thin as a Martian pancake.

"Twuik nojux obwique Spink."

"Spink?" I yelps. "Then you know me, huh?

The outlandish citizen with a nose like all the Spinks, grins at me as I am carried up the ladder leading down from the saucer. "Loxmiza nostratum," he squawks.

"And put mustard on mine," I says as I am put aboard the saucer. "I was kiddin' myself, huh? I am still in the bughouse and will wake up snug in my orlonylon strait jacket. At least I hope so!"

It is a retake of an opium dream the dome probers claim I had. The inside of the saucer is as spiffy as any lounge in a Neo Yorkus coupon-clipper's club. Then the C.O. of the lemon-skins takes me into the control room.

"Spink," he says, "you are a cousin of mine, twelve times removed!"

You could have knocked me over with a spider leg. "You talked English," I gulp out. "Where are you from, er—?"

"Quantum Spink," the character says. "I am taking you to New Mu."

"Why, that is a million trillion miles from Nougat," I says. "Who taught you to speak English, huh?"

"Why an Earthman named Spink, of course," Quantum says, and hands me a plate of something

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that looks like green sawdust. "Eat it, Sep. It is homogenized ambrosia."

"If you don't mind I'll take one of my own veal cutlet capsules," I says, and then there is a lot of gabbing and some whirring and clackety-clack sounds. Arrows start spinning every which way on the instrument panel, and Quantum Spink pulls a little switch and four seconds later I look out and see that we are already passing Asphasia. It is only the rim of the saucer that spins, the New Muan tells me.

"I guess you know the Nougats took a wallop at Mars," I says.

Quantum grins. "We will take care of that on the way, Sep. One thousand New Mu military saucers, carrying Substance YZ2HO, will rendezvous ten million miles southeast of Saturn at 1400 sound hours. We will contact them in just five minutes. You'll see a celestial rhubarb no Earthman ever dreamed up."

"Look, can we take pictures?" I ask, sweating radio-active beads. "I got throwed into a space nuthatch the last time, or did you know?"

"We have a hydrolens camera, Sep," Quantum assures me. "I will give you some prints."

I take a gander through the porthole and planets go by like milestones on the Lincoln elevated throughway.

"No Spink has ever missed a war," Quantum says and crams a handful of ambrosia into his mouth. "I had to come and get you."

"I'll never be able to thank you," I sniff. "L-Look, cousin, that looks like a school of minnows but we ain't near no water. There's a thous—it is the saucers!"

"Axtonithula!" Quantum yips into a mike he snatches up! "Gargus! Zoona! Yagiz! Hooxl! Yax Benzi!" He puts down the mike and says he has ordered his four squadron leaders to prepare for the attack on the Nougat rockets that are now just a million miles away. "We want to capture their leader, Mepha Spaam, alive!"

"That I must see," I says. "Nobody, but nobody can convince me I'm here, and if I am not I am cuttin' out paper dolls back in the neuropsychiatorium, and I don't know which is worst or more unhealthy!"

"Your forebears would give their shirts to be here, Sep," the New Muan side of the family says.

"In a few light seconds I will ask them personally, Quantum," I retort, and wipe enough worry dew off my pan to oil all the saucers all around us. "The Spinks sure never missed a thing, did they?"

It is about ten seconds away, the most decisive battle in the history of a dozen worlds. Waterloo, the Marne, Midway, hah; spitball fights. Wait until I tell you.

"Flumpozza!" my wierd cousin yelps, and I find out after that it is New Muan for 'Tallyho!' All the little pear-headed citizens take their

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battle stations, and then I see guns stick their noses out of the ports all around the flying saucer. Just picture a pin-wheel buzzing a quadrillion revs every minute, and shooting amo loaded with worse than hydrogen or split-up atoms. In less time than it took me to say Liberace the New Muan saucers chew through a wedge-shaped formation of Nougatine jets.

It is like a thousand circular saws have busted loose and all I can hear is parts of rockets pelting down on the roof of the saucer's control cabin. A Nougat rocket shell spits through the saucer right over my dome and leaves a hole you could drive a cow through, but in the very next second there is no hole. It has sealed itself.

"Get me the head nurse!" I yelp. "I need a shock treatment!"

I look out through the port and see that we are chasing a Nougat space ship right over the top of Asphasia. It is red and black and has a four-legged bird painted on the top.

"It is Mepha Spaam's rocket," Quantum says. "Watch, Sep!"

The enemy space hot rod is galloping at least forty thousand miles every half a minute but the New Mu crate is outlegging it faster than a rabbit does a turtle with arthritis. Then a beam of light shoots out from Quantum's saucer and stabs at the Nougatine space buggy and all at once my tongue glues itself to the roof of my mouth and my eyes bulge out worse than those of the citizen sitting next to me. The saucer stops dead in space and so does the Nougat hot rod.

"Exzogu Mifto zmack!" Quantum barks into his intercom, and then I look out and see a dozen New Muans running along the beam carrying roscoes. The saucer's gunners cover the citizens, and a shell loaded with Substance YZ goes off and knocks part of the Nougatine's dorsal fin off. The Nougats break out a white flag. "We have found out how to magnetize light rays after we harness 'em, Sep," Quantum says. "We have also succeeded in bending light rays. How's progress on Earth?"

"Oh, we're still drivin' horses compared to you, cousin," I says, my wits near the end.

I look out the port again. The New Muans are coming back across the beam with Mepha Spaam, a citizen who must have been a descendant of Hitler, the old Hun. Spaam has a big head with one eye, a chest like a barrel and a pair of legs no thicker than a crane's. He wears a transparent helmet and an anti-gravity girdle. He is burning worse than the inside of Mt. Vesuvius and is gnashing teeth meshed like the jaws of a bear-trap.

Spaam is brought into the saucer and trussed up with green ropes. "Brooomahoohoo!" he rips out. "Glopzatma!"

"It is a good thing we don't know what he is callin' us," I says.

"Would you like to talk with

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Earth, Sep?" Quantum asks. "I will let you report that the universe is again safe for Democrats."

"All but Maine," I sniff. "They never got beyond the atom!"

The light beam is snapped off, and the saucer begins spinning. Quantum juggles the dials on his unlimited space set and I keep my eye peeled on the viso-screen. We get a shot of a football game on Venus, a beauty contest on Neptune, and a dog show on Uranus. Then the inside of headquarters of Earth's Strategic Space Command begins to shape up. Looking out at me is Commander Bjaal.

"Talk to him, Sep," Quantum says and hands me a mike shaped like a calla lily.

"Septimus Spink callin' Earth!" I gulp. "Spink callin' Commander Bjaal from New Mu space saucer. We have annihilated the Nougatine space armada and have taken Mepha Spaam a prisoner. Over and over!"

"Y-You're in a saucer, Spink?" Bjaal howls through outer and outer space. "Ha ha ha, and I am in limbo. And you will be out on one pullin' this booboo on me."

"Awright," I says, "take a look at my pal here, Bjaal. He is not made up for Hallowe'en. Show yourself, cousin."

Quantum Spink moves in beside me and Bjaal gets as white as bleached milk, and faints like a dame coming face to face with a Martian mouse. It is two minutes later he gets his marbles back.

"Calling Commander Bjaal," Quantum says in the native tongue of one of his forefathers. "When it rains superduraluminadamatine particles you will believe us. This is Quantum Spink, Commander of Saucer Escadrille of New Mu. There'll be no good news in the Nougat Bars tonight. Venus will need no arms, ha! Oh, mad'mois'elle from Armentiers—"

It is right then and there I know that this New Mu denizen is my cousin. "Hand me the mike, pal," I says.

"Calling Commander Bjaal, all quacks in the Neuropsychiatorium in Neo Yorkus!" I snap. "I will sue when I get back to Earth for false incarceration in the violent ward. It is I, Septimus Spink who controls Earth in the palm of my hand. One word from me and New Mu knocks you loose from the solar system. Give all the school kids a three day holiday! Over and out!"

"We are nearin' New Mu," Quantum says, and reduces speed.

I look out the little port over the instrument panel and am the first Earthman to see the remote planet. It is shaped like a fifteen cent baseball that kids have used in three straight ball games and has a greenish-yellow nimbus around it. Quantum gives his crew orders in his native gabble and the saucer comes in and sits down on a saucer drome as if it weighed half as much as an ounce of goose feathers.

"First," Quantum says, "you will have to enter the chlorophlization

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chamber, Sep. You wouldn't live two minutes with red blood as you are not part plant like we Muans. It won't hurt a bit. We mix up the sun's rays with extract from the vital plant, zyxotheum. Just follow me."

I am taken in a hurry to the place that is shaped like the dome on the capitol building in Washington, and medicos of New Mu grab me, peel off my Earthman's Brooker Brothers suit, and sit me in a little metal bucketseat. They move things that look like sunlamps up close, then pull a master switch. Everything turns greenish yellow and I tingle all over like an old maid finding a burglar in a closet. The little chamber hums like ten million bees at work.

Quantum says that more than rays come out of the tricky lamps. Moisture comes also which is from the zyxotheum plant mixture, and is absorbed by my pores.

"In other words, Sep," he divulges, "you sweat in reverse."

"Is that good?" I choke out.

"Your blood stream will absorb the chlorophyl," my cousin many times removed says.

At this moment I wished he had been removed before saucers were invented on New Mu.

A half hour later I am taken out of the chamber into another room where a New Muan interne pricks my finger with a needle. My hair stands on end and lepidoptera gambol in my alimentary canal. I bleed green. The little medical citizen nods approvingly at Quantum.

"You are ready to set forth into the city of Yzocspink," cousin says. "You will most likely get decorated along with me. New Mu's highest military award is the Crow De Spink. Are you beginning to see, cousin?"

"Yeah. A Spink got here all right back in 1918. Name of Cyril. Nicknamed Muley," I gulped and see a big sign over a building shaped like a wedding cake and as easy to see through as a politician's mullarkey or a Jovian nightie. It says: SPINK VAXOZTZ.

"The Spink Museum," Quantum says. "We have the Spink University Of Advanced Solartechnology, the Spink Baseball Stadium, and the Spink Zoological Gardens. The first space ship ever to leave Earth is in the museum, and a statue of Cyril Spink stands out in front. Made of an alloy of pollybdeum and thyrodium, and won't ever wear out."

"If I remember the records back in my hermetically sealed cylinder," I says. "There was a kraut went up in that rocket with Cyril Spink."

"Ha," Quantum laughs. "He got chicken just after the takeoff and jumped out in a parachute. Maybe he landed in the Earthian alps and is preserved in old fashioned ice."

A few minutes later I am gazing at the twenty foot high statue of Cyril "Muley" Spink, Circa 1918. He is wearing a flying suit of that era when citizens flew as high as ten thousand feet. "He was the

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Thomas Edison of New Mu," my cousin says. "There were only three hundred thousand people here when he arrived. Now there are seven million."

"It is hard to believe," I says. "We Spinks could divide but we multiplied pretty lousy."

"We have an Earthian-New Mu dictionary," Quantum tells me. "Or I should say English-New Mu lexicon. Half of us can talk your language, Sep."

Me and Quantum are taken to the New Mu High Command and decorated with the Crow De Spink. Afterward we go out onto a balcony and look down on the city of Yzocspink and my dome spins around worse than the time I first guzzled a fifth of Martian Bambuie. And when I walk the ground comes up and meets my feet instead of the other way around, and Quantum says it's the chloryphyl in me. What worries me most is the two feelers that pop out of my noggin, but cousin tells me they'll go back as soon as I am dechlorophylized.

Yzocspink is built out of metal, I am told, four hundred times lighter than balsa wood and that no guided missile has been invented that can cut through it. All the buildings are round on top and the city looks like the back of a monstrous whale covered with yellowish green water blisters.

"We will get into my private saucer and go home," Quantum says. "You must meet my daughter, Zyb."

"Huh?" I force out of my throat. "Look, Cousin, I—er—that is, can't I just leave now. I forgot somethin' important on Earth. I forgot to stay there. Let's talk things over."

It is then that I hear the bad news. Quantum Spink looks at me like I am a rodent from Nougat. "What do you think I came after you for, Septimus Spink? I'll tell you! If Earth wants to survive another light year a true Spink will marry my daughter. Any questions?"

"N-N-No!" I gulp, and guess no Spink back over the centuries ever was in a worse kettle of planetary smelts.

I go quietly with Quantum in the saucer, watch him close as he putters with the instrument panel. There is a loud swish. I blink my eyes, cough once, and we are sitting down on the Quantum Spink patio. Out comes Zyb. She has hair that looks like cornsilk, which later I discover to be just that. She wears a thin dress like the old Roman dolls and displays as many curves as a Senatorial southpaw.

She says in my native tongue, "Oh-h-h-h, daddy. This is Septimus" and right away I get a load of New Mu woo.

I guess they don't have no inhibitions or finishin' schools on the planet as she is wrapped around me like a vine while pushing my nose with hers which is Nu Mu's way of kissing. I am trapped, I says to myself frantic. I must get out of here.

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Quantum says the wedding ceremonies will begin at eight and will last for three days. There will be great joy on New Mu.

"Thank you, daddy," Zyb says to Quantum. "It is the most wonderful birthday present. An Earthman. A true Spink. I will be the leading lady of New Mu."

I tell myself I will have to work fast before Quantum Spink calls in a lot of his flunkies. One thing I have noticed and that is that New Muans can't run any faster than armadillos. I judge the distance to Quantum's saucer, and take off. The New Muan cup-cake let's out a screech as I dump her into a clump of shrubbery. Quantum rushes into the house as I dash for the saucer and I know he is not after a plant-food sandwich. I am ten feet from the saucer when he comes out and yelps for me to halt. Of course I don't and then I see a tree disappear right next to my elbow as the disintegrator ray hits it.

The second time his aim will be better I am quite sure, and I am very thankful for the buoyancy offered me by my chlorophyl content as I make the jump. I soar through space and into the saucer, then bang the door behind me. As desperate as any Spink back through the ages ever was I try all the switches. Nothing happens. Sweating yellowish green fright ping-pong balls, I look out through the port and see half a hundred New Muans sweeping toward the saucer.

I yank another switch, and the saucer starts spinning, and suddenly takes off with a whining whooshing Banshee sound that scares my pants to half mast. It is impossible! I am taking off from New Mu in a flying saucer! I am sure Cyril "Muley" Spink would have done the same if he'd had a saucer in 1918.

Well, I says to myself," Calm down, Septimus. This is where you must use your dome an' not get hysterics. You are in a New Mu saucer with gadgets all marked in New Muan gibberish, and if ever a Spink flew by the seat of his pants you have got to now."

Nothing ever flew faster not even the XXX that took me back into time. I sneak a glance out of the front office and expect to see a lost angel thumbing a ride, but instead I discover I am hedge-hopping an outer space atomic service station. I picture the solar system in my mind and look for. Auxiliary Moon 3 that Quantum told me served New Mu. I must have flown ten million miles before I spotted it. I take a small notebook out of my pocket that I filled up with Celestial data when I studied Superadvanced Astronavigation at the Harvardian night school.

On page 11 I find what I am looking for. "Consider now the location of Planet Q. We can specify its position in relation to Planet X by computing its zenith distance, ZQ, and the azimuth from angle QZS, and then multiply by 7.3416. Every star has its fixed time passing

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the meridian by the universal siderial clock and this time is called the right ascension of the star. By using the Einstein III theory of relativity, one planet to the other, it will not be too difficult to determine your way around the solar system. Nutation must be kept in mind, parallaxical phenomena kept in consideration."

"No wonder I flunked," I says. "Just let me spot Nougat an' I'll know the rest of the way."

I fly close to Pluto and some nuclear fission plus hydrogel coughs up at me, and I pull a lever to the right and head for where I think I'll find Saturn. I only miss it by ten thousand miles which was a close call seeing that was only a tenth of a second out of the way. But I do not need no sky map now. Just ten million miles southeast is the milky way and the dippers and even the dumbest astrogators know that you only have to slide down the little constellations making up the handle of the big one and head straight for good old Earth.

I make it in ten minutes flat, circle over the Kremlin in Neo Moscow and hop the Atlantis in a fraction of a second. I keep flying in circles over Metropolita until I find the thingmajig that slows down the saucer. All the harnessed-up energy from the world's uranium mines are tossed up at me but nothing has been invented or discovered anywhere that will penetrate the New Mu flying saucer.

I finally glide down and land in Centralia Park, and thousands of citizens head for the bomb shelters. I get up and my legs buckle under me like dahlia stems, and remember I am still half a plant.

I push the door open and stagger down the steps that automatically fall into place. Half the armored might of the Eastern Defense Area is rolling toward the saucer. I wave my arms and yelp, "It is I, Septimus Spink!" and then fall flat on my proboscis.

And I do mean flat.

I open my eyes and look up into the face of Commander Bjaal. "L-Look," I says. "Get me to the Metropolita Medical Center an' don't spare the saucers. I am full of chlorophyl and need at least ten blood transfusions. These feelers on my dome ain't pasted on, Buster!"

"A saucer!" Bjaal yelps. "A new Muan flyin' saucer. Spink, where in the world did you—?"

"Are you kiddin'?" I choke out. "Not this world, General. Quick, an ambulance! And throw water on me on the way as I am wilting like any petunia pulled up by the roots."

They get me to the hospital and pump red blood back into my veins. A nurse faints when she sees I bleed green when they poke the needle in my arm. Interplanetary newshounds crowd the operating room. The word goes to Mars, Venus, Jupiter, everywhere.

A nurse says, "Look, Doctor, his feelers are disappearing. His skin is getting pink."

"You are a cute number," I says

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to the nurse. "But you should see Zyb. She blushes purple. Uhg!"

They keep me under observation for three days and then let me get up. I feel as if I had been towed through all the subways in the U.S. by a hot rocket, but after all I have not just been around the corner to the drugstore for a concentrated malted.

The next A.M., at a news conference covered by correspondents as far away as Asphasia, I tell my story. I give the bug-eyed characters an account of the wiping out of the Nougat Space squadron, description of the statue of Cyril Spink on New Mu, and of the Rocket, Circa 1818, I saw in the Spink museum.

The high cockalorums of the Neuropsychiatorium in Metropolita demand my removal back to the cuckoo's nest, until the brass shows them the saucer I delivered F.O.B. from New Mu. Instead of a strait jacket I get the Interplanetary Nobel prize and a dozen medals. They make me a Subcommander in Space Squadron X9.

A sample of the green blood they took out of my pipes was sent to the lab for analysis. A scientist reports that it can be manufactured in great quantities if ever the Allied Planetary war lord deemed it necessary to invade New Mu! The saucer, Bjaal said, would be manufactured by the millions once the smart boys of the age figured out the stuff it was made of.

Three weeks later pieces of the shellacked Nougatine air force fall on Metropolita and leave a film the color of gray snow on the street. And about the same time when I started hamming with my visoscreen I pick up Quantum Spink. Cousin, to my surprise, is not sore at me, and says he won't attack Earth.

"Only a Spink could do what you did, Sep. I can't blame the universe," Quantum says to me. "What else they ever said about the Spinks, they had sportin' blood. Green or red. Ha! Over and out!"

"You are a pal," I says. "Tell Zyb I will send her a package of vigoro for Xmas. Over."

I look out the window at the flying saucer that is on exhibition atop the four thousand foot Empiric Building and sigh deeply. The great wonders of the world, The Pyramids of Cheops in Egypt and the Spinks of Earth and New Mu. As modest as I am I have to admit it.

Watch for THE MAN FROM THE FLYING SAUCER — *He's on His Way!*

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space doctor's orders

by . . . F. B. Bryning

It wasn't the first time Dr. Gale had won glowing space laurels for her skill as a surgeon. But never before had she worn a siren suit.

No. 64 (I) *In view of the extreme mass-ratios involved, and the consequent excessive expenditures of fuel in transporting personnel, provisions, air, equipment, cargo, et cetera, against the gravitational influence of the earth, no surplus articles or personnel may be carried in any rocket vessel or satellite space station.*

(II) *In view of the urgent and continuing necessity to conserve consumable materials, provisions, air, et cetera, once transported into space, in the event of personnel having become surplus, said personnel may not be permitted to remain in any rocket vessel or satellite space station longer than the minimum time required for return to Earth by the earliest and most economical route.*

OPERATION AND CONTROL OF SPACE-GOING VEHICLES: *Regulations.*

"YOU ARE supposed to be in bed!"

Astronomer-Commander Allison glared as Surgeon-Biologist Ken-

Science fiction readers do not as a rule stay on the sidelines when a new writer of great brilliance scores repeated triumphs. They conspire with the editor to rush out upon the field, shouting their satisfaction with considerable gusto. From the letters we have received we're convinced that F. B. Bryning has acquired a most vocal following, and though he lives in Australia and may now be in bed—as the Commander of this fine yarn was supposed to be—we're sure he'll welcome our daytime homage.

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nedy, in pajamas, floated into his office in Satellite Space Station Commonwealth Three. "And why this sitting down attitude?" he added at sight of the curiously rigid, "knees-up" posture Kennedy maintained in mid-air, and of the harness which evidently made it possible.

"Invention of Dr. Gale's and mine," grinned Kennedy. "Prevents any leg movement. Provided I use my arms carefully, I can get about with no strain on my wound."

Closing the door behind him he pushed off from the hand rail. Touching the ceiling half-way across, he took a quick sight downwards and pushed again. Head first, hands outstretched, he caught the edge of the desk and maneuvered himself, wincing a little, into the belted chair opposite Allison. Unbuttoning his pocket he plucked out a pink radiogram.

"What are we going to do about this?"

"What else can we do?" replied Allison. "I've applied to have Dr. Gale attached temporarily to the Station as Relieving Surgeon, or alternatively as a privileged visitor on the grounds of meritorious service already performed, and her tonic effect upon morale. I have secured her extended leave from Woomera Base Hospital." He shrugged. "But they've ruled out any official attachment because she cannot qualify as space-borne service personnel."

"But as a technical specialist?"

"Tried that too. By definition a surgeon is not a technical specialist in this service, but a ranking officer. Dr. Gale is not a rank—"

"What a damn quibble! If they'd argued that a few days ago when she volunteered to come out here I might have been a dead man by now!"

"I told them as much. They maintain that the emergency is now over, and that regulations still apply. Moreover, they say that with all those riggers coming out here from 'Two' with our new hydroponics section, a service doctor with space experience must be in charge. So Dr. Bond, recalled from leave, is coming out with the main gang tomorrow, and Dr. Gale is to return to Earth the same day by the weekly supply rocket—as we were first instructed."

"What's their objection?"

" 'In view of the extreme mass-ratios invol—' "

"Ar-r-h-h!" snarled Kennedy in disgust. "Regulation sixty-four... !"

"I did propose, because of the number of extra men soon to be working in and about the station, and because of your being out of action and still in need of medical attention, that Dr. Gale might remain as assistant to Bond."

"What did they say?"

"No reply yet."

"How many riggers coming?"

"Glover and four men are outside now—about half a mile away. They have brought the new air lock to connect Air Conditioning

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with Hydroponics, and the big junction collar which they have to weld on before the main section arrives. Ted Hudson has gone out to the ferry rocket to co-ordinate his work with Glover's. There'll be twelve more men with the section itself in twenty hours."

"Well, I'm hoping for a favorable reply. I won't know how to tell her, otherwise . . ."

While Senior Engineer Ted Hudson of SSSC3 conferred with Captain Space Rigger Glover inside the ferry rocket, Foreman Space Rigger Jim McCloskey, outside, worked his small crew of three. He was fussing somewhat, he knew, but two of the men were rather raw, and there was a ticklish job before them.

"You *must* work slowly," he warned them through their two-way space-suit radios as they stood around one half of the new air lock, lashed to the hull. "These things may *weigh* nothing out here in free orbit, but there's still a three-hundredweight *mass* in each of them. If they are moved too fast they'll gain momentum capable of damaging anything they may hit—including any careless space riggers! Besides, moving things too fast out here means wasteful use of your reaction motors to accelerate or stop them."

A few feet aft of where the swept-back gliding fins began to angle out from the hull, the ship was girdled by the junction collar. Like a narrow-brimmed hat without a crown, the flanged steel hoop was heavily padded where it was lashed against the fins. Like SSSC3 itself, it had been fabricated in space alongside the interplanetary space ship construction and maintenance workshops which occupied several units of Satellite Space Station Commonwealth Two.

Five hundred miles above sea level, outside the most tenuous fringes of Earth's atmosphere, "Two" circled the earth in a fast, free orbit. No single structure like SSSC3, it was a virtual flotilla of "space-going vehicles." They comprised meteorological and astronomical observatories, research laboratories, space ship terminals for the Moon, Mars, and Venus runs, and workshop, living, medical, amenities, and recreational units for personnel.

And with them, now almost a museum piece, rode SSSC1—the fifty-year-old Satellite Space Station Commonwealth One, built, honeycomb fashion, of several rocket ships clustered about the first Australian unmanned instrument-carrying missile projected into a permanent orbit about the earth.

From Woomera to SSSC2 the many short-distance, glider-finned ferry rockets brought their small payloads up the hard pull against the drag of atmosphere friction and gravity combined. They burned fuel "excessively" coming out, but returning through the atmosphere, could land as gliders, using practically none. From the small items

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they ferried to SSSC2, units too massive ever to be lifted in one piece from sea level were assembled.

Constructed in the free orbit of "Two," however, such units became relatively easy to maneuver in space. The tussle with gravity still remained, but it was now a diminishing factor. There could be no air resistance. And every unit had a "flying start"—the very useful orbital velocity with which it was born.

So space ships which could never have lifted themselves from the surface of the earth were taking off from SSSC2 as daintily as skiffs on a pond. By smooth and gradual acceleration they built up their interplanetary velocities. So, also, by merely applying acceleration, the fabricated additions to SSSC3 were driven outwards, circling the earth in an ever-widening spiral until they reached "Three's" 24-hour orbit, 22,300 miles above sea level . . .

Having transferred the two halves of the air lock to the station, half a mile away, Jim McCloskey was conning his men as they handled the junction collar. He floated fifty yards out beyond the tip of the ferry's nose to see better all round between collar and ship. The three stood on magnetic soles at equal distances around the hull, and out of sight of each other. Across the waist of each arched a segment of the two-ton collar.

Together the three pushed forward, and the collar began slowly to move, clearing the hull at waist height on all sides.

"Slowly . . ." growled John Parry, most seasoned of the three. "If she goes aslant she'll take some holding!"

"Left—right—left—right—" intoned McCloskey's voice in their earphones. Thus he kept time until just before the hull began tapering under them towards the nose.

"Now walk 'downhill' while I count 'hands off,' " said McCloskey. "Three—two—one—OFF!"

In front of each man the flange had come up from waist to eye level by the time they released it. Like a silver smoke ring it floated ahead of them towards the pointed nose.

Yet there had been some lack of co-ordination.

"She's going askew!" cried Parry as he observed the collar veering to his left. "She'll hit the ship!"

Clumping hastily around to his right he caught up with the collar and got his hands under it where, at chest height, it was nearing the ship. Hefting upwards he struggled to hold this segment off the ship and hurry it over the last twenty feet.

Partly he succeeded, while it fought his upward-straining hands down to his waist . . . then lower . . .

"Let go, Parry!" yelled McCloskey. "Get clear!"

Parry tried to obey. But, just before he could let go, his magnetic foothold slipped on the narrowly

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tapered surface. He fell almost astride the very tip of the ferry's nose as the collar scraped across it, jamming his leg as it did so.

McCloskey was blasting towards the accident before it happened. On the way he barked into his microphone for the others to radio the station to prepare for a casualty and open an air lock. Then they were to retrieve the collar.

Within seconds he was upon Parry, whose space suit, ripped open above the knee, had loosed its air. Blood was spurting after it into the vacuum of space, to freeze instantly where it spattered the ship. Parry was unconscious and suffocating.

Pouncing like a cat on her kitten McCloskey swept him off the ship, scissored him with his legs about the waist, and whipped several feet of Parry's own lifeline from the reel at his back.

Passing the line twice about the injured leg above the laceration, he made a running knot and hauled it cruelly tight. Having thus partially resealed the suit and restricted the bleeding, he released his scissors and swung Parry about to reach and turn up the oxygen supply. Then, taking the limp rigger under his arm, he blasted towards the lights of the station . . .

Dressed in the regulation siren suit, Dr. Vivienne Gale clumped into the biology laboratory in response to an intercom. summons. The lab was already partially prepared as a makeshift operating theater. Assistant Biologist Phelan, nuclear physicist Hough, and Assistant Radio-Radar Officer Reeves were sterilizing the instruments, laying them out beneath anchoring tapes, and preparing her surgeon's overalls.

"Where is the patient?" she asked.

"Coming through the air lock," said Phelan. "Dr. Kennedy is there. He asks that you go ahead to wash up."

Vivienne Gale was in overalls, mask beneath her chin, and was squeezing the sponges in the sterilizer bags when they brought the patient in. He was already belted down on the linen-covered laboratory table, which two men steered along, several inches above the floor. Dr. Kennedy floated about them in his rather ludicrous seated posture.

Space rigger Parry, still unconscious, was now in the single, lightweight, neck-to-ankle garment worn by riggers when working in space suits. The right leg of the garment had been cut away. A tourniquet on the thigh, restricting the femoral artery, replaced McCloskey's crude but effective lashing. Above the knee was a ragged, gaping cavity the size of a man's fist, encrusted with brittle, frozen blood. And there was an ominous, unnatural angle to the leg.

Slipping one powdered arm into a rubber glove held by Hough, Dr. Gale listened while Dr. Kennedy assessed Parry's general condition.

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"Severe shock and partial asphyxia," he recited. "Usual shock symptoms . . . short, rapid breathing . . . dilated eye-pupils . . . extreme pallor . . . profuse sweating yet temperature low—about ninety-five . . . extremities cold . . . pulse too rapid—and weak . . ."

"Loss of blood?"

"More than he can spare. You realize he was bleeding into a vacuum . . ."

"No sign of the bends?"

"No. He's an oxy-helium breather, like all of us out here—and you, too, by now. No nitrogen in the blood, to bubble out on sudden decompression."

"Blood pressure?" Dr. Gale was now at the patient's side, both gloves in place, and flexing her fingers.

"Maintained so far—by contraction of the arteries, no doubt."

"Heart?"

Kennedy put his stethoscope to her ears. As Vivienne Gale listened she signalled Phelan to raise Parry's eyelids. After a glance at the dilated pupils she waved away the stethoscope.

"A local anaesthetic, I should think, Dr. Kennedy? With that heartbeat, and the loss of blood, I'd rather not use a total—"

"Agreed," said Kennedy, who nodded to Phelan and Reeves to prepare the patient for injection.

"And a large shot of plasma at once," she added. "Can you look after that while I start work?"

Kennedy smiled wryly. "We have barely enough plasma for one meager shot. We bring it here for research only. Can't afford the power expenditure to ferry fresh supplies out regularly and maintain a bank. Our blood bank for emergencies like this consists of the living men who man the station. We have all our blood types on record."

"Then we'll need two or three donors for transfusion to follow the plasma," said Dr. Vivienne Gale.

After the plasma injection Kennedy was removing from Parry's waistband the identification disk on which, with other information, his blood type was recorded, when Phelan announced:

"Blood pressure dropping rather rapidly!"

Kennedy glared at the gauge. "We'll have to hurry the transfusion. Reeves—please stand by the intercom. to call in the officers I name."

Taking Parry's disk Kennedy returned to his work bench and ran rapidly through the pages of his register.

"Here's a real difficulty," he reported a few moments later. "Patient's blood is type 'O.' As you know, his type can donate blood that is compatible with any other type, but can accept only their own type. And none of our three 'O' type men are in the station at this moment!"

"How does that happen?" Dr. Gale, tying an artery, spoke without looking up.

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"Middleton's on Earth furlough. Dr. Bond is with the main gang of riggers on his way here, but won't reach us for nearly twenty hours. And Senior Engineer Ted Hudson is outside, working with the advance riggers. He is the only one available . . . Reeves—please ask Radio to contact Senior Engineer Hudson urgently!"

"How long before he can get here?" asked Dr. Gale.

"Best part of fifteen minutes—assuming he can be reached at once. Somewhat longer if he's inside the ferry and has to get into his space suit and through their air lock."

"Not soon enough, I'm afraid. And if Mr. Hudson donates all the blood this patient needs he is going to be unable to work for a few days. That will mean delay of preparatory work, and then a lot of idle men waiting around on the main job, won't it?"

"And wasting 'consumable materials,'" added Kennedy. "But it can't be helped. There's no alternative."

"I am thinking of one alternative," Vivienne Gale replied. "My blood type is 'O.' I'll be the donor."

"But Dr. Gale . . . You can't afford to give as much as—"

"I can give enough—and at once—which is what counts. Please take samples now for agglutination check."

"But you'll be prostrated—weak for days . . ."

"I shall have the wound tidied up in a few moments, Dr. Kennedy. You can set the leg while Mr. Phelan does the transfusion. There is really no other way . . ."

Time was short so she lay, weightless, on the edge of the operating table, held in position by Hough, while Phelan operated the pneumatic bandage and the two-way syringe. By the time Kennedy had set and bandaged the leg, color had returned to the patient's cheeks. Taking charge of transfusion, Kennedy eyed Dr. Gale critically.

"Now *you* have the pallor! It is very becoming, but I think you've given all you should. How do you feel?"

"Rather lazy—and a bit thirsty," she admitted, unable to hide her increasing languor.

"I'm still getting Hudson in," he said as he began checking Parry's reactions. "We can top off with some from him, which he won't miss. He'll lose no working time. Meanwhile you have saved the situation."

A few minutes later, even as he was checking her condition, she fainted . . .

Vivienne Gale revived in her bunk, strapped snugly between the sheets. Her forearm was bandaged, and Dr. Kennedy had his stethoscope over her heart. He grinned as she felt beneath the bed-clothes.

"Still in your siren suit. It's good sleeping attire—and warm. You can change when you feel stronger . . . Now what are you smirking at?"

"As my medical adviser, Dr.

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Kennedy, would you recommend travel by rocket ship for me in the next few days?"

"Certainly not!" he exclaimed fervently. "Rough accelerations are out of—" He broke off, to laugh aloud as he saw the point of her question. "I forbid it for at least a fortnight . . . Satisfied?"

Tongue in cheek, eyebrows arched, she shrugged in mock resignation.

"What choice have I? . . . Doctor's orders!"

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terror in the stars

by . . . John A. Sentry

Darkly mysterious was the lost spaceship with its mummified crew. But darker still was the dreadful secret of the Truns.

"Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round
walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, a frightful
fiend
Doth close behind him tread."

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,
Samuel Taylor Coleridge

THE DEELAN ship's rickety overdrive arced out for the next-to-the-last time, and she wallowed into normal space with a sigh from her generators. Thereafter she limped along on planetary drive while the last spares were brought out of their lockers and desperately mounted, the last grog allotment passed around.

"I imagine that just about does it," Captain Dekkin sighed, nodding at his executive officer.

"Nice try," the latter conceded. "Better luck on your next. I never did think much of scientists," he added, with a wry smile. "We'll have a lot of time to hate 'em, after the next set blows."

Man's potentialities as both a builder and a destroyer have left so ineffaceable a mark on human history that a visitor from the stars might consider him a truly terrifying enigma. But if an age of pure creativeness should supplant that up-and-down spiral and man should grow in stature throughout all eternity might not such a growth inspire terror too—if our star visitors should be the Deelans of this stirring story.

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"How far do you think we came?"

Meyl shrugged. "Who knows? It's easy to forget that hyperspace is another universe—a completely unfathomable universe. We only know with certainty that the generators set up a warp that throws the ship into it. We chug along for a while—theoretically, as long as we want to. Then the generator sets up another warp that throws us back into normal space."

He frowned thoughtfully, then went on: "According to the scientists, the hyperspatial universe is so constituted as to let us travel farther and faster in relation to our own universe—than we could ever hope to do in normal space. In a way, it's like taking a shortcut across a field. We can't even tell what hyperspace looks like. Our screens don't work on their kind of light, and I'd rather be exiled for life than put on a suit and go outside for a look. But, according to the scientists, mind you, if we point ourselves in the right direction, we'll be traveling along the same line in relation to our own universe."

He laughed. "The only trouble is, the generators keep cutting out. Theoretically, we're about three-quarters of the way across the Galaxy from where we started. On the same pipe-dream hypothesis we ought to be getting reasonably close to the place where they've figured the Truns come from. But actually—" He grimaced derisively. "Actually I wouldn't bet a burnt-out generator replacement tube on our actual position."

The Deelan ship inched along infuriatingly between the unfamiliar stars. Dekkin looked at his screens for one last hopeful time. But there was nothing friendly to see—neither the stars he had always known nor the impossible constellations he had memorized, and copied from the charred and crumbling paper on the legendary Turn chart.

Dekkin exchanged a long bitter hopeless glance with Meyl. "Think we might make it on the next jump?" he asked.

Meyl grimaced for the second time. "When we're not even sure we're going in the right direction?"

Dekkin acknowledged his first officer's discernment with a slow nod. But then, he had only been expressing a hope—a whistling-in-the-dark kind of optimism which he knew was forlorn.

Meyl said: "There's an outside chance the Truns might find us."

Dekkin smiled sadly. It was his turn to puncture the false hope. "Ten thousand years since the ship reached us—and how many countless centuries of drifting before that?"

No one knew. Even now, with all the centuries in which to conjecture, to study, to postulate and to theorize, there was no Deelan living who would venture to guess how long the mummified Trun ship

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had been sleeping in the bast cradle of the stars. Finally, it had drifted down to crash on a Deela with an industrial revolution barely under way.

Those first, clumsy Deelan scientists had reconstructed her from her fragments as best they could. They did not do so badly. You could actually see the long, slim shape of her, her metal torn and oxidized where her atmosphere tanks had gouted into space. But it had been decades before they knew enough to understand what liquid oxygen could accomplish, how it could be stored, and what would happen if the tanks were ruptured.

They had found what was left of her crew, some of them dressed in sealed suits that more or less preserved their cadavers. A century later, she had been reconstructed again, and the mistakes of the first effort corrected in the light of Deela's growing scientific knowledge.

Two centuries after that she had been reconstructed for the second time, while Deela learned the universal laws the Truns had used as casually as a child uses his multiplication tables.

This much they knew: the Truns were a bipedal, hairless—or nearly hairless—race. Their upper limbs were slighter, more dexterous developmental versions of their legs, which terminated in five-fingered hands, with one finger serving as the thumb. They had been, as far as could be determined, a pale-skinned race, tending in the main to be a very light brown in color, but with variations ranging from pinkish-white to a definite tan. They were about as tall, apparently, as a Deelan.

The Truns came from a nine-planet solar system—more specifically from that system's third planet. This the Deelan scientists were able to determine from a careful study of the ship's charts.

The Truns came from staggeringly far away. This much, also, could be determined from the charts. But no matter how painstakingly Deelan astronomers projected the suns and solar systems inscribed on those charts—no matter what imaginary stand they took for their angle of reference—they could only shake their heads in bewilderment. There was nothing like that, they said, in the sky they knew.

Finally, when the Deelans built their first crude ships, and discovered for themselves what sort of apparatus was required, the Trun ship was reconstructed for the last time. There is a compelling logic in machinery which is universal. There is one supremely efficient way, and only one, for an airlock to operate. It is the same with the design of a rocket motor. And a radio set is a radio set, though the circuitry of one may utilize components different in outward appearance from those of another.

There is a logic to labelling these things, too. For the first time,

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the linguists had something to work with, even though, at the beginning, it might be no more than the Trun symbology for "air-lock," or "radio."

A dozen centuries after the ship had smashed herself into a jigsaw puzzle on Deela's soil, the persevering investigators discovered what the Truns called themselves. Poring over the tattered books from the ship—or, rather, the photographs of pages that had long-ago crumbled and fallen away—peering at the charts, and guided by the symbols inscribed beside that red-marked third planet circling an alien sun, they patiently translated, until they found the key. And with its discovery the skeletons in the ship ceased to be pale monsters. They became Truns, from Tura, Sol's third planet.

And still, no Deelan knew where to search for that alien sun and planet. No Deelan knew how long the mummified ship had whispered to its dead among the drifting stars. Not for another nine thousand years, and not until Dekkin's ship, hung, lost and lonely, in the doleful deep of boundless, foreign space.

While Dekkin watched, the trouble lights on the Ship-Condition board turned back to green again. He turned to Meyl, and found his executive officer grinning sardonically.

"The wonders of modern science," Meyl commented. "They may not build reliable equipment, but they certainly devise some wonderful systems for informing you when it collapses."

Dekkin shrugged. "Let's admit it, Meyl. We knew we'd be risking our lives on the first hyperspatial ship ever built. We knew the trip would have, at best, an infinitesimal chance of success, even without equipment failure. We knew we might die out here, lost, cut off from all hope of rescue. Yet we volunteered—knowing all that.

"We can't—or at least, we shouldn't—make tragic figures out of ourselves simply because our intelligent fears turned out to be well-grounded."

Meyl nodded slowly. "You're right, of course. And, who knows? Our next jump could conceivably land us in the middle of the Trun home system."

Dekkin passed judgment on the sanity of that remark with an ironic smile and the briefest of shrugs. He sighed. "Well . . ." He punched the Hyperdrive stud, and the unfamiliar stars outside dissolved into streaky tears that ran remorsefully across the screens . . .

Meyl, alone in his own compartment, sat behind his chartboard and toyed with his dividers among the sketchy astrography.

Nine thousand years. Nine thousand years, with no help at all from that mass of fused machinery in the Trun ship's engineroom. A thousand years spent in just exploring the Deelan solar system. Another thousand prodigally expended in

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getting a foothold on the planets of the nearest neighbor stars. Ships going out with their crews in suspended animation.

Ark ships, designed as miniature universes, breeding and rearing generations in the long flight between the stars. And ships that atttained a velocity quite possibly exceeding the speed of light, playing tricks with spacetime, returning with crewmen in their thirties who had been born three hundred years before. All the long, slow methods, consuming time, blunting the starward drive of the race, making the conquest of space a patchwork effort, at best.

And then, finally, hyperspace—the drive the Truns had possessed ten thousand years ago, and more. And not even a decent hyperspace, but a rickety, unpredictable thing that concealed, in its ponderously complex workings, mysterious flaws that blew generators at the slightest sneeze.

They had reasoned, on Deela—safe on Deela—that the Trun star must be somewhere in the yellow clusters that hung all around the rim of the Galaxy. They had reasoned, also, that it had to be on the other side of the Galaxy, for it was most assuredly not on theirs.

Meyl cursed harshly and stabbed his dividers into the charts. It was almost as if he could hear himself protesting: "Let's see them apply reason to this situation! Let them come out here and sit, waiting for the last generators to blow! Let them find a logical solution to the problem of familiar space too far behind ever to be regained, with only strange, wild stars ahead."

And if they found the Truns—what then? Granting the possibility, was the prize worth seeking? All that was known of the Truns had been gleaned from a dead, broken ship and her crew. What of ships thousands of cubits in length and breath, glowing fire at the mouths of tubes large enough to swallow a Deelan craft and never even cough? What of Truns alive, not corpses mummified? What would living Truns think of an alien ship that came blundering into their empire?

To attempt to return was death. To go on was to pass ever more deeply into mystery.

Meyl jumped up with an unquenchable cry of frustration and rage, lashing out at the chartboard. As he stood stiff-muscled and seething, it clattered across the compartment and fell to the deck, the pinned-down charts uppermost. The Trun stars looked up at him mockingly . . .

In the arc-seared engineroom, scarred by the dozen electrical fires that had raged there since the ship had left Deela, the last explosion was almost a relief. The extinguisher system worked perfectly, and the engine hands had the benefit of experience. The fires were out in minutes, and the engineers could at last relinquish all responsibility together with all hope, and let the

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entire weight of the common burden pass to the captain's shoulders.

They had no way of knowing what Dekkin saw through his screens as the ship passed out of hyperspace and irrevocably broke back into the normal universe.

Dekkin stared at the sky. "How far do you think we've come?" he asked Meyl in a whisper.

Meyl shook his head. "I don't know. A hundred light-years from our last position—or ten thousand. It might be anything." He was breathing harshly.

A city hung suspended between the stars. Agleam with soft light, linked into a whole by the graceful arcs of long, ribboning traceries of roadways, corruscating in the night, it drifted gently down on them.

"There's no dome . . . no air . . ." Meyl whispered.

"A robot city?"

"*That*—for robots? Look at it, man! *Look* at it!"

Dekkin looked. He saw dazzling patterns of color, green and black and gold, shimmering up the steeps of the city's delicate structures. Ruby-red flashed fire at his eyes, and silver drifted off into the distances like frozen moonlight.

"How big is it?" he asked.

Meyl measured it with his navigator's eyes. His glance swept from left to right, hesitated, began again, turned aside. He shook his head. "I don't know. I can't follow the pattern."

Dekkin tore his eyes away and flicked off the screen. He shook Meyl by the shoulder, vigorously. "You don't have to follow the pattern to make a rough guess as to its size."

"It would utterly dwarf our three largest cities," Meyl said.

"Do you suppose," Dekkin asked, "that we've found the Truns?"

Meyl stared at him helplessly. "It's quite possible. I don't know—"

Dekkin nodded. "Neither do I. But we're in no condition to pick and choose. We'll have to appeal to them for help, Truns or not." He added wearily: "Even if it's a city of the dead."

Meyl looked at him, puzzled.

"It may be a dead city," Dekkin said. "There was nothing moving on the roads, and no movement between the buildings. We should have been challenged by now. There's not even a patrol craft."

Meyl switched the screens on again for a quick glance, then shut them off with a convulsed motion of his arm. "*That*—dead?"

Dekkin nodded.

"What in the name of space could *happen* to the builders of a city as tremendous as that?" Meyl flung out an arm and pointed beyond the blank screens at the city's shimmering circumference.

"I don't know. Perhaps they were Truns, and the same thing that happened to their ship happened to them here. Perhaps they were Truns, but so far removed from the ships's time that the two

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have no connection. Perhaps they were not Truns, and the Truns conquered them. I don't know."

They looked at each other again. The only possible answers lay in the city, in its vastness, its strangeness, its depth upon depth of weaving radiance that seemed as fathomless as the night itself . . .

Dekkin, Meyl, and a small party of crewmen drifted toward the towering metropolis in their spacesuits. Already, they were so close that they could not see past the city in any direction, north, east, west or south.

Dekkin shivered a little. He looked over his shoulder and saw that the group was spread unevenly back toward the ship, the more timid men moving forward barely at snail's pace.

"Close ranks!" he ordered brusquely.

Flame burst from the stragglers' suit-jets, and they became a tight knot of men once more. But the flame died almost instantly, and cold darkness and cold starlight swept back, while the pile of the city showered cold, magnificent color on them.

"There's a landing stage of some kind," Meyl almost whispered, pointing.

Dekkin made sure the rest of the men had seen it, then jet-propelled himself up toward it. Meyl moved up beside him. They switched off their radios, touched helmets.

Meyl's voice, conducted by the plastic of their fishbowls, was hollow. "No safeguards," he said.

"Yes, I thought of that," Dekkin answered. "Do you suppose the builders didn't care whether the city was looted or not?"

Meyl shook his head. You could ask questions, but there were no answers for them. They drifted apart before the other men had a chance to notice their private conference and become apprehensive.

They touched the landing platform.

Meyl was pointing unobtrusively at his chest. Dekkin looked down and saw he had forgotten to switch his radio on. As he did so the low murmur of his men's helmeted breathing returned to his ears.

"Captain—look over there!" One of the crew was pointing.

A wheeled machine of some kind was rolling toward them over a smooth surface of polished stone. Instinctively Dekkin's hand leapt toward his gun.

"No firing!" he ordered harshly. "I'll give the order when its needed."

The machine was obviously a transport. Rolling on its eight wheels, it swept swiftly nearer, and Dekkin saw that it was large enough to hold all of his men. Meyl was watching it closely, his body tense.

The machine, starlight-trapped and mellowed in the dull sheen of its metal, stopped directly in front of them. A door on its side opened,

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folded down. As it touched the platform, its metal shivered and then, incredibly, it began to melt. It twisted, still fluidly changing shape, and became a set of impossibly proportioned steps. There was a click, and soft lighting flooded its interior.

Dekkin stepped forward hesitantly.

"I beg your pardon." The voice was soft, mellow, and it spoke perfect Deelin in a perfect accent.

Dekkin spun around in ludicrous haste, as if convinced that one of his men had suddenly taken leave of his wits.

"I beg your pardon," the voice said again. "It was I who spoke. I am a robus. My apologies. It took me a few moments to perform the required analysis and alter my circuits accordingly."

Dekkin stared at the machine' his mouth suddenly dry. The steps had re-aligned themselves, and the shape of the doorway had altered. The interior lighting had changed to a more pleasant shade.

"Please accept my services," the robus said.

It was Meyl who was first able to make the necessary mental readjustment, and speak to the machine directly.

"Is this a Trun city?" he asked.

"It was," the robus answered. "Though, by the time it was built, The Trun called themselves Ras."

So . . . How many millennia separated the Trun from the Ras, while mummified in their suits and a pilotless ship slipped among the stars and the gas-clouds? How long . . .

Dekkin spoke hoarsely. "Are there no Truns left?"

"Not here," the robus replied.

"Where, then?"

"I don't know. I know only as much as they taught me. When they left, it became impossible for me to acquire new knowledge."

Suddenly, Dekkin began to laugh. The sound clattered in his helmet until, he felt Meyl's touch on his shoulder, and realized that the others were watching him.

He scrutinized the machine more intently. "The Ras built and taught you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And you are not unusual. Am I correct? *Your* duties are to welcome visitors. But there are other machines, with other duties, and with just as many talents as you possess?"

"Far greater talents," the robus said. "I am only a single-purpose mechanism."

"Meyl, Meyl, Meyl . . ." Dekkin murmured sadly. "We came to find the masters—but even the slaves are gods, compared to us."

The executive officer nodded slowly.

"Will you come with me?" the robus asked. "The city is yours, for as long as you may care to remain."

Dekkin shook his head wearily. He looked at Meyl's face, and saw mirrored in the strained eyes, and

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tight, unsmiling lips a despair equal to his own.

"No," Dekkin told the machine. "There would be no point in our staying. Tell me—are there ships here? Ships that could take us back to our home world?"

"Yes. The Ras left their ships behind, when they went away."

"Will you take us to one?"

"There is no need, unless you wish to rest. I will call one."

"Thank you. No, I do not think we will rest here."

The ship, like the robus, spoke Deelan. Without waiting to be asked, it had provided an oxygen atmosphere for them, and there was Deelan food in its lockers. The fittings, too, were Deelan—Deelan with an added perfection of artistry that Deela's craftsmen might themselves achieve, someday. The incredible craft hovered beside the weary Deelan ship, extending its airlock and altering it to fit the narrower Deelan airlock while the crew transferred.

Dekkin slumped in a chair, watching his silent, shuffling men, come aboard. Deep in his mind he somehow knew he was in the presence of a crew that would never go to space—possibly never laugh—again. The old, thrusting Deelan pride was gone, forever. He looked at Meyl.

"I hope it's not a long journey. I want to go home."

Meyl nodded. "I, too. And never leave again. Thank God the ship runs itself. If my one, consuming desire is to lie in my cabin and simply gaze at the ceiling, I can imagine how the crew must feel. But we'll be home soon. At least this craft has a working hyperspatial unit."

"Are you ready?" the ship asked.

"Yes," Dekkin told it. "You know where Deela is, I suppose?"

"Certainly," unlike the robus, the ship spoke almost arrogantly.

Their departure was instantaneous, like the shifting of a carefully focused beam of light. The city simply melted on the screens and became a puddle of molten color. For an instant the stars ran sulfur-yellow in the sky, and then the ship was in hyperspace.

Meyl sighed.

The ship lurched, and there was a flash of fire. It flickered across the pilot compartment and was reflected up the corridors, and from the distant engineroom. With a dull droning the ship dropped back into normal space.

"My apologies," the ship said, with a curious, rather startling uneasiness in its voice. "A malfunction of some sort. It will be corrected immediately."

Meyl looked at Dekkin, his eyes wide with astonishment. "Well," he said. "Well. So the Truns had their little difficulties too?"

"Re-entering hyperspace," the ship said, evenly.

Dekkin shrugged. "It might have been anything."

"It might have been, but—"

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The ship lurched again. Stars re-appeared on the screens.

"This is very unusual," the ship announced. "Repairing."

Meyl was sitting with his mouth half-open, the thought which had come to him recording its staggering implications on his face. "No," he muttered, shaking his head. "No, it couldn't be."

"Once again, my apologies," the ship said, more humbly than before. It, too, seemed puzzled. "Re-entering hyperspace."

The stars dissolved, and once again they were in the silent universe where light was motionless and matter flowed like electricity.

"Tell me, ship—what can make a hyperspatial generator fail?" Meyl asked.

"Nothing," the ship answered. "That is—nothing to my knowledge. If a generator can push a ship through the barrier at all, there should be no further load on it until it is used to re-enter normal space. Even then, the return should be accomplished before the generator can possibly be damaged seriously enough to impair its functioning. That we know—from the laws of hyperspatial transfer. Once in hyperspace, the generator is absolutely invulnerable."

Dekkin frowned. "But our generators did fail. Time after time."

"And it's happening now—to another ship," Meyl interrupted. He clutched the arms of his chair. "Look, Dek—"

Abruptly the ship lurched again. Dekkin groaned.

"Dekkin—" Meyl persisted urgently, ignoring the new failure. "The stars on the Trun chart—remember?"

"Well?"

"How many billions of years ago, Dekkin, do you suppose it was that the universe looked like that? How many stars have been born since then? How many have died? Just how much has the universe, swinging and shifting, changed its physical aspect since those charts were drawn?"

Dekkin stared at him, startled comprehension in his eyes. How many centuries before the Ras built the city—the long-dead and abandoned city—had they called themselves Truns and left a ship dying in space, victim of some accident or action he could not even begin to visualize?

"It might be," he conceded. "It just might be . . ."

"Well, then— And did the city have a dome? Was there ever an atmosphere around it?"

"No," the ship said. "The Ras did not breathe." It, too, seemed fascinated by Meyl's train of thought.

Meyl looked steadily at Dekkin, as if debating whether it would be wise to tell a man so emotionally shaken what he had already told himself.

"No atmosphere, Dekkin. And a city in space. Do we live in space? Have we *evolved,* Dekkin, to the

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point where we do not breathe, and so do not need to eat or drink—a point where we must nourish our bodies on the energies of stars themselves? How many millions of years will it be, Dekkin, before Deelans live in space as naturally as they now live on their home planet?"

Dekkin shook his head in desperation, but Meyl kept relentlessly on, as though his own sanity depended on his not being alone with his knowledge.

"Consider," he said. "We begin on a planet called Deela, or a planet called Tura—and we spread to other planets. We take to hyperspace, and conquer the universe. And, through the long years, we conquer space itself, and cease to pay any attention to mere planets.

"Now consider hyperspace, and the hyperspatial drive. A drive which has always worked—which *must* work—but which now works in fits and starts, as though a wagon, jouncing along a road, were to catch its wheels upon a row of unevenly spaced rocks.

"And now think. You have left planets to live in space. If you leave space, where must you go?"

Dekkin stared at his executive officer, whose hands and arms were trembling.

"You might—you might go on to hyperspace. And if another civilization were to rise, after a time, and tried to travel through it—"

"Yes, Dekkin. Exactly. Who knows what we would do to them? Are we passing through their cities like cannon shells? Are we somehow disrupting the entire fabric of their universe, so that we are cast out into normal space again?"

Dekkin looked at him woodenly. His arms and legs felt heavy. "They—they would hate us with a consuming hate. Do you think they're looking for us?"

Meyl shook his head as though his neck were made of clay. "I don't know. If I was one of them, I would be."

Dekkin's voice sank to a hoarse, despairing whisper. "How would they go about it, do you suppose?"

"I don't know. How would *we* trace down something that was flashing through our planets, going through solid matter like a hot knife plunged into butter? We'd trace the trajectory, project it backward—and find the source. We'd make sure nothing like that could ever happen again."

"Deela!"

Meyl nodded. "I wonder if they've found it yet? And if they have—I wonder what they did to it."

"We've got to get back!"

Meyl gestured toward the useless generators. "How?" he asked with a bitter smile. "On planetary drive—At the rate of one light year for every two of our years? That's forty thousand years, Dekkin. Would you care to try?"

"I'm afraid even that would now be impractical," the ship said, its voice fatalistic.

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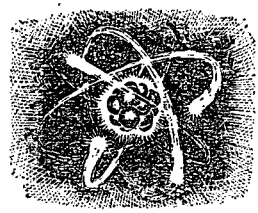
Dekkin jumped up, staring toward the screens. Meyl, taking longer to realize that the ship had been talking about an immediate danger, could not stop him in time. He could not stop him at all.

"Don't, Captain!" Meyl shouted. "There's no point—it's better not to—"

But Dekkin had reached the screens, and was peering into them. Meyl, unable to take his own advice, thrust himself out of his chair and stood beside him.

Off in one corner of the screens, still small but growing rapidly, the blackness was spreading. Gigantically eclipsing the universe, extinguishing the suns as they came, the Truns were advancing toward them.



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incident

by . . . Thomas J. O'Hara

A floating coffin was the ship, its lone survivor specter-gaunt and adrift in a pitiless universe.

HE WAS, now, the last one left alive.

The captain had gone first, quietly and without preparation.

There had been no hint of the plague's coming—no slightest premonition of death.

There had been only the briefest of prelminaries: the sudden, burning fever; the quick decay of flesh and the bright-hued, bursting sores. Then had come the terrible vertigo and the brief mindless interval before the agonizing end.

The next two had gone a little easier.

The second mate had simply not awakened one morning, and the third victim, the engineer who guarded and supervised the workings of the great uranium-fission chambers that drove the mighty star-ship, had noticed at first only a mounting vertigo which was swiftly followed by a fever which brought a bright flush to his cheeks.

A prize-winning story emanating from a college course eminently successful and pioneering will, we are sure, be of paramount interest to our readers. The idea was happily suggested and guided by our book critic, Mr. Robert Frazier and by another editor, Mr. Samuel Moskowitz, who conduct in able association the SCIENCE FANTASY WRITERS' WORKSHOP *at the College of the City of New York (School of General Studies, Extension Division, Fall-Winter Semester recently concluded). Mr. Frazier and Mr. Moskowitz made a careful selection of the most promising stories submitted by their students and the editors of* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE *acted in a further advisory capacity in deciding on a winning entry to be published in our May issue. We think you'll agree that Thomas O'Hara's fine story was a most felicitous choice.*

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Reeling, he had clutched at the rail guarding the edge of the power-machines, then, before he could sound an alarm or cry out for help, a sudden fatal spasm convulsed him. With a soundless shriek he plunged headlong into the mass of throbbing machinery, and burning, radio-active material.

A moment later, like a great burst of flame, his remains dissolved into a million tiny, glowing fragments that flashed from the great exhaust tubes to a final end in the cold wastes of space. Like a glowing nimbus, his final, mortal atoms spun round the ship—a halo of radiant death cleansed and purified by the absolute-zero cold and the burning heat of energy-breakdown.

The fourth victim was wiser by far—he killed himself before he became infected.

There had been six of them plunging headlong at tremendous speeds through the darkness of a night that was beyond all reckoning, plunging endlessly through a sea that knew no charting, nor had heard of any shore-line. The flames of endless giant suns had shot past, the tiny, beckoning eyes of a thousand planets, and yet they had passed onward to a greater goal.

Six of them, hermetically sealed in a vast metal argosy—a giant trireme sailing the interstellar seas of a vast and pitiless universe in search of new worlds undreamed of; a galactic ship that had now become a self-contained coffin without even an atmosphere for the dead and dying to breathe as their desperation increased.

This was, for the crew, an interlude in an expanding saga of exploration and discovery, a single incident in the cosmic drama important to them alone.

The ship had been checked and double-checked and checked once more at the start of her great odyssey.

"We have explored and conquered the nearer planets." The captain had reminded them. "But who can guess what lies beyond in other systems, other galaxies?"

How remote now seemed the skyport in the dawn, and all of that far-off day's activities.

Where had the sickness come from? They had no way of knowing, beyond their certainty that it had not originated in their own world. Was the answer to be found in an improper diet, the too sudden adjustment in atmospheric content and volume, or even in a minute frozen spore lodged in some tiny crevice in the exhaust tubes or the hull—a frozen bacillus brought to the ship on some tiny chunk of rock from some unknown world?

A daring surmise worthy of further research and investigation. Tomorrow, on another world perhaps, but certainly not here and now in this flying missile of death; this tragically doomed and expiring space-giant.

Their hopes and expectations had soared in the beginning, but

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now the great dream was dead and lying with the bodies of the spacemen. It had been man's first dream of galactic empire; and might well be his last.

True, there would be other space-flights, but they could never be the same. This was the first, the virgin voyage—and beyond it was the bitterness of a lost hope, of a broken dream.

For the hopes and aspirations of a whole race, of a great people, to break and settle in a trough of frustration, was in itself an incredible sin. It was a sin against the Mind that had created and breathed life into the vast and lonely emptiness of the interstellar void.

And now, plague-ridden, the vast ship plunged downward toward the surface of a strange new world.

Its seas stretched wide and blue across the televiewing screen, and its rich brown earth stretched out a warm and welcoming hand. Its very youth sounded a clarion call to rest and dream from the weariness of the long voyage.

Light-aureoled clouds stretched about it, girdling and shielding it in clinging, wispy fragments of dream-traceries.

The ship's lone survivor cried out—in agony, and not as a protest against the beauty of the world below, and the memory of his comrades, dead only hours before. Once again the strange sickness twisted a sharp, agonizing knife against his vitals. Once again the vertigo gripped him, and pulled him to the floor with a giant hand.

The tele-view screen, the control-room, the universe itself seemed to melt beneath him, so that for a full, terrible moment he felt himself to be without support, plunging toward the spinning, twisting mass of the approaching planet.

Clouds and skies, the blueness of seas and the harsher greens and browns of vegetation spun vertiginously as he stared and became a tortured nightmare to his inflamed senses.

Crying out again, he sank to the floor and sobbed his bitter loneliness to the darkness of the long night.

It must have been hours later when consciousness returned to him.

He lay on the floor, obscurely aware of the muffled throb of the powerful engines vibrating through the ship, and grateful for that awareness.

Finally his faculties steadied and he got weakly to his feet, only to be reminded again that he had but a few short hours left. In the tele-view screen he could see the new planet plainly, its bulk swelling the view-screen with its nearness.

All at once his true position became clear to him. It had seemed for an instant as if this strange world might offer some release from his suffering. But, now, he realized that the hope was a mockery and a snare.

What would it matter if he succeeded in landing safely and the

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planet's atmosphere could support his kind of life?

His fate was already decided. A few brief hours of freedom and then—death, swift and remorseless.

There was no known cure for his disease. And the chances of the inhabitants or an alien planet possessing such a cure, or even being familiar with the disease itself, seemed infinitely remote.

His face set in hard lines.

He thought of the plague sweeping the green world like some ravening specter of the night. In his mind he could picture the inhabitants dying in agony, crying out in bitter despair as the terrible vertigo came upon them.

To the right of the televiewing screen was the small control-unit which regulated the output of the atomic generators. It was an output that could be doubled and tripled —that could turn the ship into a flaming mass of raw energy and destroy it, or bring it to a controlled and gentle landing.

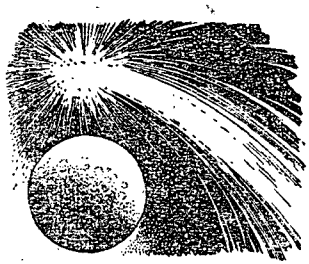
Deliberately, gently, he reached out and shifted the control handle—

In a green valley far below, a girl with spun-gold hair raised her head from her companion's shoulder.

"Robert," she murmured, contentedly. "Isn't it beautiful?"

The boy's arm tightened around her slender waist. "It's only a shooting-star, darling," he said. "It doesn't mean a thing—"

In the distance a steeple bell started chiming, and the twilight deepened above the green hills and valleys of Earth.



Another very unusually fine contest story will appear in our next issue— EXCHANGE *by Robert Epstein. It won* honorable mention *and was a very close runner-up in the final judging. The mature and extremely imaginative concept underlying it redounds greatly to Mr. Epstein's credit, for he has shunned the innumerable hackneyed themes available to a newcomer in the genre and charted a boldly original course right at the start.*

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genus: little monster

by . . . R. E. Banks

Unlike a young orangutan or a young chimpanzee a human infant has a long learning period. But there are, of course, shortcuts!

HOLY GEE! Am I ever on the spot!

J. Roy Smith, aged one, is about to have his budding career clipped off at the roots.

I fell asleep downstairs last night and Mom found me in the living room! Boy, was she astonished. And when she was blubbering and hollering about how did J. Roy get out of his upstairs crib and downstairs on the sofa when he's only one year old, I told her to "Knock it off." I was half asleep or I wouldn't have tipped my hand about walking and talking already.

Believe me, I'm on plenty good baby behavior now. Here I am trying to keep my maturity hidden from my parents and I pull a boner like that! All because I worked too hard on the family robot and got tired. But Robotsmith is ready now, so my hurry to finish paid off.

I got a problem. Maybe I got several problems, but they'll all be solved when I get the family robot rigged up so that I can travel around in it.

Because, naturally, a one-year old child can't travel around on his own without causing comment. This is the first mistake I've made in six

Some fifteen years ago a bright young novelist in search of a thematic bombshell introduced a startling idea into serious imaginative fiction. A baby just wasn't human! A baby belonged to a species apart, and only gradually acquired human characteristics as he regressed into maturity. R. E. Banks, an extraordinarily gifted newcomer to the science-fantasy fold, has here, with chuckles quite lyrical, atomically gilded that bombshell.

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weeks of my new maturity and one more like that will ruin everything.

Actually, you can blame that goofy type that lives next door, Professor Ames. He's a bachelor and a physiological psychologist, and he has some dumb theory about people who are never really mature enough to handle things, and how nice it'd be if you could feed some of them a drug like vitamins and they'll suddenly be very mature and smart.

He's been feeding me his special drug surrup, surrip—well anyway on the sly, and the folks don't know about it.

Six weeks ago he mentioned the idea to my mother. He calls it "Maturo." He thought it might be interesting to try it out on a child and there're three of us.

My mother gave him the glare. "I've never heard of anything so ridiculous in my life," she said. "Why not try it on yourself—you could stand a little beefing up of the intellect."

The reason she said that, once he invented a lawn manure that was going to make our fortunes. He got my father to put a couple hundred dollars in it. They tried it on our lawn and it brought up the crab grass so fast that people were coming from way over on Oak Street to shudder about it and complain that once something like that got started it could ruin the neighborhood.

I guess the good Prof. took offense. Anyway, he began to slip me Maturo on the sly. "You're going to be famous, sonny," he said, "even if you have dimwits for parents."

But I've always been a thoughtful kid. In about three weeks my mind was as advanced as that of a twenty-five year old adult. I learned how to walk in a day. I learned how to talk by listening to television and I took to sneaking downstairs at night to read the books in the family library, because I had a tremendous thirst for knowledge. But I told no one, not even my brother and sister.

The first book I read in our library was about a kid who was a genius at a young age. One of those dumb fantasy things. I saw at once where the kid in the book made his mistake. Couldn't wait to show off. Once the adults caught on, everything was ruined.

Lucky I read that book! Before that I was saving up to surprise the pants off Ames and the rest by making a clear-cut statement. I couldn't decide between "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party" and "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary—"

The kid in the book solved some important time-space problems that foiled top scientists and wowed the stock market and was making twenty-seven thousand a week to boot. Then a dumb adult dropped him on his head and he ended up a "gooer" and a gawker, and his parents clasped hands and stood

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around, tickled as hell that he was just a plain old baby again.

Imagine giving up twenty-seven G's a week just to become a plain old baby! If that happened to me, I'd go off in the corner and blow my brains out.

No, sir, I'm not going to tip my hand to any adult. Ames still doesn't know that his stuff works, and he never will.

Only to pull off that trick, I've got to get my own supply of Maturo.

Step *One:* Fix up a cubicle for myself inside the chest cavity of Robotsmith, our family robot.

Step *Two:* Sneak into Ames' house and steal a bottle of Maturo. Then to hell with Ames.

Step *Three:* Once I get the Maturo, I can begin my real career. I'm going to found a League. Did you ever stop to think that the children form a network complete and distinct from the adult network of human relations? The kid next door knows a kid down the block who knows a kid in the next town and so on.

The adults will think my League is just kid stuff, because there're all kinds of kid clubs. But all of a sudden some mighty funny things will happen. Roy Cassidy won't be popular on TV any more. Gumbo Cornflakes won't move off the shelves.

Then suddenly they get a letter asking for a League donation. If they kick in, they're made, and the stuff moves. If they don't, grawwwkkk! They'll never sell another box of their fool cornflakes.

I can do it, too, because my League funds will bring benefits to the kids. Perfect handwritten excuses to skip school on a rough day. Smart kids doing lessons for the dumb (for pay). Free ice-cream slipped to my kid leaders from the neighborhood ice-cream trucks owned by the League. A special toy exchange, rich kids to poor, a special body guard, poor kids to rich. Organization is all. Look at Caesar. Look at Napoleon.

Kids have the greatest power in the world. The power of making an unbearable stink about the house. We might even influence the appliances, the cars, the houses they buy. Just give me time!

Only I'm practical. That's for later. Right now I've got to solve the Maturo problem or I'll fade back into being a baby again and nobody, even a one-year old, likes to travel from a greater to a lesser intelligence.

For instance, I toilet-trained myself a couple of weeks ago, but I have to keep on messing up my diapers so the folks won't get suspicious. Problems! Problems!

Well, Step One has been taken. Last night, as I've already said, after a gruesome struggle I did finish re-wiring Robotsmith so I could go out in him. I used a book on electricity from the library and did a fairly good job. Now if I can only beat this-being-caught-downstairs rap—

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I'd better knock it off now. Mom's coming to get me for the morning bath, so this writing stuff goes back under the mattress . . .

This afternoon I was out on the lawn having my sun and playing alone in the play-pen when Ames came back from college. That's usually when he slips me the Maturo, just like vitamins on an eye-dropper out of a small brown bottle, being sure my parents aren't around.

But today he picked me up and glared in my face.

"I heard you were found downstairs last night, sonny. I heard you told your mother to "Knock it off."

I deadpanned him.

"Wrawkkk," I said. "Sclattummm."

I didn't dare cry for fear Mom would come and I wouldn't have a chance to get my Maturo.

"Listen, you jerk," he hissed at me. "Don't give me an act. My Maturo works, and you're just trying to pretend it doesn't." He shook me.

"Glubbb," I said, using the old standby.

"Get this, youngster. I've spent years working on that formula and no snot-nosed kid is going to ruin it for me by pretending it doesn't work."

He shook me some more. He was red in the face, and I, in the meantime, managed to pluck the brown bottle from his coat pocket and drop it on the grass without his knowing it.

"No more Maturo, you little monster, until you come across with me," he said. He set me down firmly and I covered the bottle with my tiny body.

He walked away and then turned and came back.

"Don't think you've fooled me, squib. No baby would let himself get shook that hard without crying unless he didn't want his parents to come out before he'd gotten his Maturo. You'll get no more from me until you level."

He left me.

I took the bottle and opened it. To hell with Ames. He'd have his second thoughts and doubts soon enough. Probably even start giving it to me again. But I didn't need him now—maybe never again if I were lucky.

I lifted the eye-dropper and started to squirt a jolt down my throat. At that moment Mom came around the corner of the house and gave a scream.

Ordinarily my parents are sleepy-minded people. They had even satisfactorily explained away my odd behavior last night to their own adult-world satisfaction. But they can act fast when baby's life is at stake.

"Roy, drop that ant-poison!"

Not only did she snatch it from me before I could take it, but she dashed the precious brown bottle in the trash barrel nearby and it broke into a thousand pieces.

At the same moment Ames came

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running out of his house. He'd missed his Maturo bottle.

Excited confab. Mom showed him the broken bottle and he relaxed. He told her that the bottle contained a harmless vitamin preparation that could do me nothing but good even if I had taken some. He also hinted that kids should be broken of the tendency to pick pockets at an early age.

Now I'm really up-loused. And I've got to act fast. Tonight I'm going to take Robotsmith out and see if I can sneak some Maturo on the sly. Meanwhile, my afternoon nap period is over, so back go these pages under the mattress.

Well, it was a hell of a night all around. It began when I got up about midnight and fortified myself with a boiled egg I'd hidden in my rompers. Then I fixed up one of my sister's dolls in bed to look like me, in case the old man got the belches and began staggering around the bathroom, half-asleep, looking for his bi-so-dol.

Problem: How to get out of my room? My parents had locked the door because they were afraid of my sleep-walking routine.

I did get the window up and looked out, but we have a two-story house and there was no ivy to clamber down. The window was out.

Say, did you ever try crawling around for an hour in a warm air duct? It's great for the liver. I've lived in this house for a whole year but the world looks different when you're on the inside looking out. I took off the register grille and snaked into it and started on my travels. The first time I ended up in my brother's room and sneezed and woke him up. I had to lie quietly in the dust for quite a while, beside the heat register. My hand worked in the grille-work and I couldn't jerk it loose.

I finally got hold of myself. "J. Roy," I told myself, "you're lousing it up, just like an adult. You're looking for an easy way to do it, and there ain't no easy way. Take your lumps."

Those moments alone on the wrong side of the register like being in prison, staring at the wide patch of moonlight on the floor, my nose itching from the dirt, my hand hurting and frustrated by my failure was the turning point of my life.

I realized that I lacked daring. What was Napoleon without his daring? Caesar? It was time for J. Roy Smith to start living dangerously.

I jerked my hand loose. It hurt but there was no real damage. In the commotion I found a half dollar in the dust and knew that my new-found philosophy of living was the right one for me.

I crawled back to the hole where the heating duct swooped down into a horrible darkness of the first floor and commended my soul to whatever gods look down on very mature one-year-olds. Then, hanging from the edge, I let her go.

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There was skin loss, but on the whole it was fun. Here adult chicanery helped me, because instead of falling right into the basement and the furnace and ending my miserable career, I ended up on the first floor register in the living room right where I wanted to be.

I came down pretty hard and there was no problem of working the register loose. I banged it open with my head and it went flying across the room and I slid out between the legs of Robotsmith right where I wanted to be.

Then I held my breath, for the old man upstairs was stirring. He tramped into the bathroom to get his bi-so-dol, unlocked my door, took a peek in at me, locked my door and went back off to bed. Two gets you one he never realized he was up. I've seen him some mornings at breakfast reading the sports page upside down and complaining that the sportswriters wrote the goddamist gibberish you ever saw.

I guess he'd still be reading that sports page except that we got tired of him saying every morning "Well, I see Oregon whipped UCLA."

Once I got into Robotsmith I was all right. My soft spot still throbbed and I ached all over, but I had rigged the robot to take the bumps for me and I was safe inside. I walked the robot out the back door as pretty as you please; it was like having a new, adult body of my own.

The career of J. Roy Smith was launched!

At first I was pretty awkward, but I bit down hard on my milk-teeth and forged ahead. During the trip I fell into a fishpond, bashed into a tree and landed on the robot's head while climbing the fence.

At this point my parents' bedroom window shot open.

"Wazzat!" cried the thick, sleepy voice of my father.

Instead of cringing, I got mad. So much endured for so little! I jerked the robot up off the ground and made it shake a fist at the window.

I had rigged up the robot's response-record system to amplify my own tiny, new-found voice.

"For God's sake, nosey, go back to bed," I shouted at him.

From what he tells at home, my father spends a lot of time at work getting shouted at. I guess he was still half asleep and took the shout as an order.

"Okay," he said. "Okay, okay."

He dropped the window and disappeared.

I clambered over to the good Professor's home, trying the doors. They were all locked but there was one window lighted. When I peeked in, I got a shock, for there was the good Professor sitting on the sofa, talking to Mrs. Snellen.

Mrs. Snellen is not bad if you like them forty years of age and divorced, and I guess Ames could not be choosers, being pretty old

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and a bachelor himself. Anyway, there they were, yakking away with a big bottle on the coffee table and a couple of drinks in glasses alongside.

They weren't doing anything they shouldn't have, and I oughtn't to have been surprised because as a Psychologist the Professor takes on a few of his neighbors as patients from time to time.

Like the time he told Mrs. Warmer that she could cure her son's stutter if she and every other member of the family always stuttered too, to make the kid feel easy about it, and not feel he was too different. It worked swell; only the kid's stutter was due to a little physical retardation of his throat muscles and he outgrew it in a few months.

But Mrs. Warmer, who used to be able to spout a hundred and fifty words a minute without stopping and none of it complimentary, stutters to this day.

She thinks Ames is a s-s-s-stuffed s-s-s-shirt.

Through the open window I could hear a little of the dialogue.

"Tell me more about your college days, please," begged the woman, her eyes hanging on his face like he was the inventor of colleges.

"Well, I was at the head of my class, of course. All of the fraternities were knocking themselves out over me. And the girls on the campus, well—"

Ames smiled a little bashfully and rubbed his nails down his lapel.

All of a sudden I saw it. A bottle of Maturo. It was sitting on the end table behind the sofa. I don't know how it got there. Maybe Ames was whipping up a new batch when Mrs. Snellen came over for her consultation. Maybe he put it there so he wouldn't forget it when he left for school the next day. He had muttered once something about trying it on animals. Anyway, there it was.

At the precise moment when I saw the Maturo, Ames stood up and said proudly, "Would you like to see my college trophies?"

Mrs. Snellen stood up too. Her eyes were large and moist. "Would I! My God, I'd love it!"

The fact is that Ames was Phi-Beta Kappa and he always manages to get it in the conversation sooner or later. They both took a couple of uncertain steps and Mrs. Snellen giggled, half-falling against Ames. Ames looked annoyed at this and eased himself away from her and left the room.

Mrs. Snellen stood there staring after him. "I wonder if it's worth it for his six thousand a year," she sighed out loud. She gave a business-like hitch to her girdle and reached over for her drink to swish the remains around and polish it off.

At that moment a white streak shot into the room.

It was me. I'd waited an eternity to get a chance at that Maturo. It

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was quite late and I knew it would be days before I'd get a better opportunity. And I had to have that Maturo tonight!

The window wasn't open far enough for me to get Robotsmith in. Almost without thinking I acted, following the idea of living dangerously.

I thrust open the door I'd cut in Robotsmith's chest and oozed through Ames' window. I scooted across the rug and over the coffee table and up on the sofa and snatched the bottle.

Mrs. Snellen stared at me in horror. She shook her head, stared again and dropped her glass with a crash.

"You're kidding!" she gasped.

I grabbed the bottle and made it back to the window before her scream broke. By the time Ames got back in the room I was inside Robotsmith and lifting the eye-dropper to take my jolt. The stuff went down cool and easy and I felt better all in a flash.

"What's up! What's wrong!" cried Ames.

She pointed at the window, the coffee-table, the sofa and the place where the Maturo had been all at once. She had only two hands and I think he thought she was poisoned.

"There, there everything will be all right," he said, forcing her down on the sofa. He held her there with a knee on her chest.

"Lucination!" she cried. "Lucination. A little baby in rompers came running in . . ."

"There, there," he was saying. Then his face broke into understanding. "Why, that little jerk!"

I will always love Mrs. Snellen for what she did next. She'd probably been angling all evening to get that arm-lock on the good Professor. She picked that moment to faint.

"I'm going to faint," she announced, and she did, her arm muscles standing out in ridges as she held on like death to the Prof. She dropped her head to one side and closed her eyes prettily, but her full-nelson worked. She bent the Professor down, still with his knee mashed up there between them. It looked uncomfortable to me, but he was temporarily out of action and with a jolt of Maturo inside, I felt like a new kid. I took off for the bushes.

Then I saw that our house was ablaze with lights. Evidently the old man had awakened my mother.

I could see their heads bobbing inside, so I beat it around to the front.

That was my mistake. The folks had called the police and just as I came around the corner of the house a squad car tooled up the street, pretty as you please.

"Halt in the name of the law!" cried the driver's companion, poking his gun at me.

I kept right on going, clear across the front of the house to the back again. There were a couple of blasts

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and I felt Robotsmith jerk like he was mosquito-bit.

Then I felt a hot trickle on my tiny leg.

"They got me," I groaned. "They got me."

Robotsmith crashed to the ground opposite the cellar window. My door flew open and I sprawled on the grass. I looked up at the moon for what I was convinced was the last time, and prepared to give up my soul after the bravest struggle a boy ever made. The friendly stars, the soft night wind, so much to live for, and it all ended so soon—

Then the jagged end of the broken Maturo bottle prodded my diapers. J. Roy Smith would live to fight another day, but that bottle of Maturo had taken its last ride.

I jumped up. I could hear running feet now and my parents arguing about who left the back door open. I slammed shut the entrance I'd cut in Robotsmith's chest, and I flipped the dials back to normal operation for him. Then I ducked for the cellar window. My soft spot must be the toughest little soft spot a lad ever had. I bashed open the window with it and slid into the cellar, ending up on a pile of coal just under the window. A rusty window catch had saved my life and the window fell back in place.

Outside the cop was giving my father hell.

"What's the big idea, sending out your family robot to prowl around so late at night? You a robotcrook, or something?"

"But I left him in the living room—"

"It's all right, officer," sighed my mother. "My husband walks in his sleep. Even his children do. He probably came downstairs still asleep and sent the robot out to get some bi-so-dol."

"That's no excuse, lady."

"My husband," said my mother firmly, (and I could mentally see the way she pursed her lips) "once had a nightmare, a dream about eating a steak and came downstairs and sent the robot to an all-night market—"

"Now, Martha," protested my father.

"From which," my mother went on, determined to prove how stupid he was, "Robotsmith came back with fifteen pounds of tenderloin at one dollar the pound."

"For once I got a second helping in this goddam house," muttered my father defensively. There was a silence.

"Well, let's knock off this steak routine," said the cop. "Let's be doing our shopping around here in the daytime, huh? Everybody agree?"

"I wasn't sending Robotsmith out for steaks," said my father, hotly. "I was simply—"

"Yes, what the hell were you simply doing?" asked my mother.

My mother is a kindly woman, except when awakened late at night.

I stayed not to hear more. The

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furnace was turned off and I went back on up the register system as fast as my tiny legs would carry me. It took about twenty minutes. I had to do that because my brother and sister were racing all over the house, having a ball, and I didn't dare expose myself even to them.

I sank down comfy with a sigh, safe in my own bed. At least I'd had my jolt for the day. I had been brave when bravery counted. General Matthew Ridgeway could ask no more.

I had barely gotten in when my door popped open and the folks peeked in.

"Thank God," whispered my mother, "at least we didn't waken the baby."

* * *

Well, I can finally thumb my nose at the entire adult world. I have at last gotten one whole entire quart bottle of Maturo to call my very own, and it came about in a funny way.

My folks went out for the evening and left Professor Ames as our baby-sitter. They've had their feuds but they always make up because baby-sitters cost dough and Ames doesn't charge. Ames, in his cunning, adult way, was more than happy to get a chance at me alone, suspecting all along the true instigator of what was fast becoming a neighborhood legend, the Midnight Battle of Maple Street.

But first he had to get the older kids to bed.

For my part I dozed pleasantly while the poor man worked like a fiend to settle them down. He romped with Jerry and Jean on the floor. He played cowboy, fireman and space ships.

His motives didn't fool me. He was trying to tire them out. He grew sweat beads on his head and Jerry and Jean had a ball. I've never seen them so wide awake. The more he worked the livelier they got.

At last they played "Door." We've got this trick hall closet door that when you slam it, it bounces open twice as hard. It will surprise you if you don't know anything about it. But first you have to lure your victim into real action; they suckered him into a game of hide-and-seek.

"I caught you—you're it!" gasped the good Professor, tagging Jerry at last, panting and blowing, his eyes bugged out.

"No—not until you carry me back to the 'it' post!" cried Jerry, taking off at a run.

I knew what he was up to. He's doored the hell out of all the kids in the neighborhood and one irate parent threatened to sue over his kid's broken noggin.

Anyway, Jerry took off across the living room floor and Ames, wearing his ghastly now-I'm-playing-with-kids grin, took off after him. Jerry flashed the signal to Jean who giggled and they went romping out into the hall. Jerry headed right for the closet and tore inside, slamming the door.

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Jean stuck her foot out to trip Ames, one hundred and eighty pounds of intellectual manhood flopping off-balance, just as the door bounced open again with that wicked swing it has.

"Blooommmp!"

Living skull struck lively wood, and Jerry got credit for what he and Jean call a "Whiz-bang." A mild bash is a "Goodie," next comes a "terrifie" and then the master-stroke, the "Whiz-bang." The whole house shook. Ames roared like an angry bull and sat down holding his head. No man, except my father, had ever taken such a lordly bash.

My brother came out of the closet and stuck his finger in his mouth. He made his eyes big.

"The door bounces," he said innocently.

"Sonny," said Ames, "I know the door bounces."

He got up limply and retreated to the living room where he sat down on the sofa, a defeated man. There was a big, red bump on his head.

"We will now watch television," he said bitterly.

And nothing they could do would inveigle Ames off the sofa. So we all watched television and Jean and Jerry went to sleep almost at once, which they'd have done two hours before if he'd had the sense to turn it on.

* * *

"Now," said Ames, coming back after seeing them in their bunks upstairs. "You and I have a small matter to settle, young man." Ames took a large bottle of Maturo out of his pocket and set it on the coffee table. He glared at me.

"Now you're going to level," he said. "I know you sent that robot out last night to steal my Maturo, and I'm going to wring a confession out of you if I have to beat you within an inch of your life!"

He took off his leather belt and snapped it wickedly.

I could see my career was doomed. Ames had the greatest gift a child could ever want, a fast grower-upper and all he wanted to do was exhibit it at some scientific meeting and get his name printed in the academic press. What did he care about the happiness it meant for the thousands of kids? Or even J. Roy Smith, for that matter? Here he was about to beat up a poor, struggling little boy hardly dry behind the ears yet just to advance his own personal glory.

Something had to be done. Chances would have to be taken. Neither Caesar nor Napoleon would've hesitated in this dire moment, and though I was bravely facing the supreme childhood peril of an enraged adult, I kept my head. I would give ground if I must but would beat a strategic retreat.

"D-O-G, dog," I said.

Ames practically fell on his knees. Astonishment, delight, sheer rapture came over his features.

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"Say that again," he said, his voice trembling. "Say it again!"

I wet my lips like I needed a jolt. He got the idea right away. He leaped up and served me a jolt of Maturo out of his large bottle. He knelt in front of me, peering at me with insane delight.

"Now!"

"D-O-G, dog," I said, clear and simple.

The poor fellow leaped up with a shout. "I've made it! I'm famous! A one-year old who cannot talk—spells, reads, talks perfect English!"

You see what I mean? Here I could've reeled off a whole chapter from a Henry James novel without dropping a preposition and he was jumping out of his skin over "D-O-G, dog." Adults are satisfied with nothing, nothing at all.

He strode to the mirror and adjusted his tie. "Genius," he hissed at himself. "Genius."

Then he got on the phone and called up Mrs. Snellen. You'd have thought he'd invented the world. He told her to rush right over—he had reached the triumph of his career and he couldn't pass that great moment without celebrating.

By the time she arrived, breathless, he'd found Dad's liquor and poured a couple of drinks. He took her by the arm and led her proudly to the sofa. He pointed down at me, propped up by the cushions.

"Say it, Roy, say it!"

"D-O-G, dog," I said.

"Maturo," said Ames. "One-year old, can't talk, read or spell—until he took my famous preparation!"

"OH, WINCHESTER!" she breathed. She kissed him. She kissed me. Mrs. Snellen is an attractive woman. I clung on and kissed her again and again. Wow!

By that time people were beginning to arrive. Just a few friends that Mrs. Snellen had told to come over to our house because there was to be a party. Old Ames had all my father's liquor out and was serving them fast, dancing around the room with Dorothy Snellen and bringing all the newcomers in to hear me say my piece. I found it highly amusing.

In our neighborhood all you have to do is step out on the porch and whisper "party" and four couples will instantly appear, beaming, dressed in their best clothes. By midnight we had the joint jumping. Ames was off in a corner with some of the men trying to form a syndicate and Mrs. Snellen was knocking together a pretty fair tale about how everything on their marriage was settled except the time and place.

They had forgotten about me, and that was their mistake. There was a whole litter on the coffee table, including an empty Three Geraniums bottle and a full Maturo bottle. I made a quick pass and then there was a full Three Geraniums bottle and an empty Maturo bottle. I capped my hard-won supply of the stuff and sniggered it under the sofa with my tiny leg.

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My parents took that particular moment to return. I shall never forget the look of astonishment on their faces when they walked in the living room. Ames was giving a speech in one corner of the room, telling how he'd begun life in a poor, simple tenement and had fought his way up by his bootstraps and Mrs. Snellen was allowing herself to be congratulated on her coming marriage by kissing the hell out of any man unwary enough to wander out of the crowd to the darker corners of the living room. I'd never seen darker corners.

"My child!" screamed my mother.

"My liquor!" groaned my father.

"Believe me," said a nondescript celebrant from over on Locust Street, "this is one helluva party." He forced drinks in my parents' hands. "The police have been here twice to shut us up. This guy who owns the house must run a distillery."

Then my mother exploded. When she explodes, she throws things. I scrabbled for cover under a sofa cushion and the room emptied with squeaks and squeals and squawks. It took about seventy-five seconds for Mom to put the quietus on the works.

"As for you, you worm," she shrieked at Ames, "I'm going to have you sent to prison for making the poor child witness your degenerate revels." It was a long shriek but she held it.

"Say 'Dog,'" Ames yelled at me. "Look, he can say 'Dog.'"

My father rose to the occasion. He bashed Ames on the mouth.

"I don't care if he can say 'Staten Island Ferry' in the original Sanskrit," scolded my mother. "If you ever so much as look into this house again, I'll have you sent to jail for child torture—"

Well, there the matter stands. Our house is off limits for the good Professor Ames. He doesn't know I've got the Maturo—he thinks one of the guests drank it. My parents have cooled down somewhat, but they watch me like a hawk. But I think I've got 'em fooled. Occasionally they pick me up and ask me to say "Dog."

Then I do and it tickles the hell out of them. I'm the only kid in our whole sub-section who can say "Dog" and spell it at the age of one year. But they can't get me to say anything else because I know that will satisfy them for weeks and weeks.

Meanwhile I'm waiting for things to quiet down. Adults can't concentrate on one miracle for very long. When they forget, then I go out and found my League and really get started. But right now I'm biding my time. And don't worry—I'll find a way to make the Prof. keep kicking in with more Maturo.

Like Caesar. Like Napoleon.

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the huntress

by . . . Richard R. Smith

She was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, and in her eyes was a promise of paradise. But to live in paradise a man must die.

MY HEADLIGHTS silhouetted her against the dark-surfaced billboard and even at sixty miles an hour, I could see she had curves and a thumb in the traditional position of a hitch-hiker.

I passed her, wonderingly. Then, on a sudden impulse, I stopped the car and backed up.

She opened the door, threw a suitcase on the back seat, slid across the front seat until she bumped against my arm and said, "Thanks."

It was too dark to see her face, so I mumbled something and started down the highway again.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"No place special." Her voice was soft, warm and joyous as if ready to burst into laughter at any moment.

"Where are *you* going?" she asked.

"No place special." It was a lie, but it sounded good. Actually, I had a very special destination: my home, wife and kids were approximately fifty miles down the highway.

I broke open a pack of cigarettes and thrust it toward her. She ac-

We have read a good many vampire tales by reading-lamp radiance, with the wind whistling eerily in the eaves, and a steeple bell tolling from afar. But seldom have we read such a vampire thriller as this, with its aura of billboards, weather, hitchhiking and quite realizable future science. This is Mr. Smith's third story for us, and with each new yarn his stature has grown.

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cepted the offer. She lit my cigarette, then her own.

"Are you a salesman?" It was meant to be a question but some inflection in her voice made it sound like a statement.

"How did you know?" I asked.

"A guess. I saw your briefcase and papers on the back seat. What do you sell?"

Her perfume thrilled me. It was different than any I'd ever smelled. Would *exotic* describe it? It was as if the most exciting scents from a hundred types of flowers had been mingled in just the right proportions.

"I sell paints," I told her. "Not door to door, but to big businesses and factories that need a lot of paint."

We talked for the next two hours. Some people talk about the weather, politics and sports. She and I talked about destiny, the ecstasies of life, space travel and alien civilizations. We talked about how it feels to kill something, to fear the unknown, to die, to love and to be drunk. We even discussed jungles, work, pain and types of people.

It was the most interesting conversation of my life. It was so interesting that I drove fifty-four miles in the wrong direction before I realized where I was.

I stopped the car and glanced in the rear-view mirror. My house was only a few miles from the highway. A small side-road leads directly to the front porch. That side-road was now fifty-four miles behind the car.

"What's the matter?" she asked in a soft voice.

"I was so busy talking to you that I drove fifty miles out of my way!"

"I'm sorry."

I turned to stare at her. The headlights of an approaching car illuminated her face and for the first time, I got a good look at my companion. She was beautiful. It was the kind of beauty that makes men abandon all caution. For a full minute I stared into her fathomless blue eyes.

"What's your name?" I whispered.

"Almira. It's Arabic. It means: a princess."

"You are a *princess.*"

She laughed. "I am."

We continued to stare into each other's eyes, neither of us moving or speaking. We said a lot without saying a word . . . Messages and replied. Offers and acceptances. It was the first time in my life that I had carried on a long conversation with my eyes.

I drove to the nearest motel.

The modern log cabins clustered at the edge of a forest, but although the small buildings were close together the surrounding trees and bushes gave each an appearance of isolation and serenity. Only the brightly-lighted brick office building struck an incongruious note.

The clerk was bald, unshaven and engrossed in a pin-up girl

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magazine. He looked up as we entered the office, hid the magazine, took the cigar from his thick lips and asked, "Can I help you?"

"Got a cabin?" I inquired.

He replied with a little speech of three dozen words that said in effect, "Yes."

While I fumbled for my wallet, I saw him glance at Almira's left hand and the wedding ring that wasn't there. He looked at me and smiled. One of *those* smiles. Then he looked at Almira . . . really *looked* at her for the first time. He had difficulty taking his eyes from her.

He gave me a key and I clutched it in my palm as if it were a key to paradise. He pronounced a number and I memorized it as if it were a password to eternal ecstasy.

As we walked to the cabin, I was acutely conscious of every surrounding detail, as if inner excitement had sharpened my senses abnormally. My ears registered the crunch of our feet on gravel, the hum of tires on the distant highway, the whispering of the wind in the trees and even the chatter of invisible crickets. Each sound seemed distinct; almost thunderous.

It was a small cabin.

I turned on the lights, locked the door and sat down. My knees felt weak.

She undressed with majestic poise, and without a trace of shyness. She was not ashamed, though I never took my eyes from her. She acted as if it was the most natural thing in the world for her to undress before an audience.

When she was undressed, she turned and smiled at me. The smile seemed to say, *You may look but I'll never let you touch me.*

Her body was unbelievably beautiful, white and voluptuously formed. My temples started pounding.

I found myself thinking, *I don't want you. I love my wife. I don't know why I came here . . .*

She smiled again, turned out the lights and reclined on the bed.

And then it began.

Something left my mind and with it went *desire.* All desire for all women. The erotic ardor drained from my mind, floated away and vanished completely. Somehow, I knew the emotion had departed forever. I would never be attracted to a woman again as long as I lived.

Compassion vanished as well. For a brief moment, I had felt sorry for myself but even as I experienced the emotion, I could feel it draining from my body like water through a sieve. *All* compassion for the living—and the dead.

Sadness departed next and I knew I could never feel sad about *anything* again. I would be incapable of sorrow. My wife and children could die and I would not grieve.

It rained—beat against the roof and windows and splashed on the driveway outside the cabin.

Fear drifted away from my brain. Fear of all things—even of pain

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and death. Fear of the unknown. I would never again be afraid of anything.

And because of that, for the briefest instant, I felt *proud*. Then pride itself slipped from my mental fingers, and a numbness took its place.

One by one, my human emotions slipped away into the dark night to some unknown, unimaginable destination. I could feel them going one by one: little emotions, and big, overpowering ones, and some so elusive they seemed scarcely emotions at all.

I tried to rise from the chair and discovered that my legs had become paralyzed, useless. Hate grew within me like a raging inferno. Anger at the unknown *thing* that was stealing my most precious possessions.

The rain stopped.

I wasn't angry anymore.

Joy was the last to go, and its departure became an eternity of pain. It was like swimming through an endless sea of broken glass. I wanted to scream, but something wouldn't let me. Hours flew by like the passing of seconds.

Dawn came, and I still sat in the chair, staring at the woman on the bed.

The paralysis of my legs ended abruptly.

Almira arose, dressed and smiled at me as she started for the door.

I followed her.

"Will you explain?" I begged, clutching desperately at her arm.

She turned and studied my face while a smile trembled at the corners of her mouth. The the smiled vanished. Her face changed visibly, and tears glistened on her smooth cheeks. I thought: *She looks like a woman who has shot a rabbit and is glad. Glad. And then, she goes to the rabbit, and looks into its large, tormented eyes . . . and cries.*

She explained but not with words. We stood by the door and in my mind, I saw a majestic city. Shining structures of metal thrust their towers high above the clouds and their foundations deep into the ground. The buildings were thronged with radiantly-garbed men and women, and, everywhere in the city, there were massive, audibly droning machines a hundred times more complex than an atomic generator.

I saw *farms* filled with strange pink animals, and as I watched in horror I saw the inhabitants of the great city devour them with a sickening greediness. It was not the animals' flesh which they devoured. *With their minds, they feasted on the creatures' multitudiness emotions, drawing them into their own coldly inhuman minds, and digesting them with relish.*

The last telepathic picture: A ship that traveled through space with a speed incalculable. I saw it flash through dark, empty dimensions and land on Earth. A woman left the strange ship . . .

"You see," Almira whispered, "on my native planet, I *am* a princess. I came here to *hunt*." She

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cried out ecstatically and raised her arms. "Your planet is a jungle and your race are beasts in the jungle. I hunt them and I trap them. And I eat their emotions as I consumed yours." She pressed slender fingers against her temples. "And I do it because it gives me a rapturous satisfaction which you could not even comprehend."

Her arms dropped and she stared at me pleadingly through tear-filled eyes. "Do you understand?"

I nodded. I felt exactly like a dying rabbit staring up in hopeless torment at a victorious hunter.

She opened the door and left. The room was empty—and so was I.

I wanted to be afraid and could not.

I wanted to cry and couldn't.

I couldn't even be angry.

I opened the door. She was standing beside the highway, waiting.

I wanted to run and scream a warning to everyone but my legs refused to move and my mouth wouldn't shout. She had done something to my mind. As long as I lived, I would *never* be able to tell anyone about the strange huntress from another world.

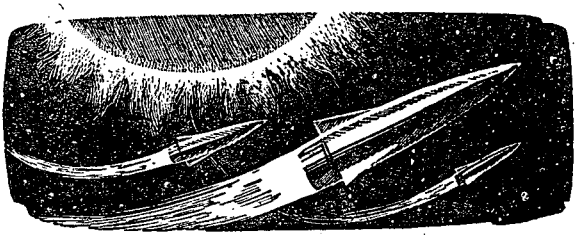
My lips were forever sealed.

She signalled a bus to stop.

I watched her as she boarded the bus, and wondered how many disguises she would use, and had used in the past. How many men would she meet in bars, and hotels, on roads and beaches—*everywhere?*

How long had she been on Earth?

The bus hurtled down the busy highway.



Every so often we receive from Leslie Charteris—our good friend, and widely roaming correspondent—items of fascinating interest. Here is one we can't resist passing on to you. It seems that Mr. Charteris recently visited Barro, Colorado, an island in Gatun Lake set aside as a wild life sanctuary under the National Research Council, and administered by the Smithsonian Institute. And amidst the natural history splendors in the sanctuary's laboratory, amidst microscopes and jars of pickled bugs and the erudite, well-thumbed volumes of the scientists who study and work there he saw—you've guessed it—a copy of FANTASTIC UNIVERSE!

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the shark

by . . . Ivan Janvier

A tiger is cut from different stuff than a shark. You never can tell what he'll do in space

SENIOR LIEUTENANT Granville Green was thin, almost scrawny, fortyish, and, recently, apologetic. He stood opposite Gruber's gold-leafed desk, unhappily shuffling his feet for lack of some other opportunity for self-expression. Gruber glowered at him from under bushy eyebrows ideally suited to the purpose. Angry words beat against Green's doleful face and echoed faintly from the office walls.

Gruber's voice, like his eyebrows, was formidable. It deepened into thunder for purposes of exacerbation, rose to an aquiline scream in profanity, flowed gently, with a sound like water over jagged rocks, in sarcasm. It rose and fell now, clubbing one more contusion into Green's beleaguered soul. The lieutenant stood with hunched shoulders and faced into the wind.

"But . . ." he said finally.

"Did you say 'but?', Lieutenant?" The voice was like a mother's to her favorite child. "Are you having trouble with your butt, too?" The voice hit soprano and went up. "After all, there's no reason why not. Everything else is wrong with you! *Get your butt out of here!*" A window rattled.

For sheer technical brilliance and carefully worked out detail this exciting saga of space cargo-ship commanders by Ivan Janvier compares quite favorably with the stories of F. B. Bryning which have won such enthusiastic acclaim from our readers. Both writers are master hands at stark realism.

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"That's all. Request denied. Get out." The voice took on exhausted tones.

The lieutenant threw an abject salute, about-faced shakenly, and left, his pay no higher than it had been . . .

As a matter of strict fact, there had been a time when a mere civilian like Gruber, Governor or no Governor, would have thought more than twice about speaking to Green in any other than extremely respectful tones. In those days, fifteen years before, Granville Green was a Colonel in the Rangers, riding the peak of his glory after the Asteroid Pirates had been broken at Smith's Landfall, and the remnants herded into the military prison on Syrtis.

But it was at Smith's Landfall that Black Bannister had rammed Green's ship and ended the brilliant career. One-lunged Colonels are superfluous in the Rangers, no matter how illustrious their past, or steadfast their loyalties.

Eventually, he had turned up at Libertad as a hired hand. The Free Republic of Libertad—located on a fairly large asteroid—felt the need of a small patrol force, if only for the purpose of holding an occasional parade. And Green still cut a fine enough figure in the scarlet uniform, the right side of the chest carefully padded. Besides, his name still counted for something. The pay supplied enough of the luxuries of life to make it a comfortable way of growing old gracefully, and he had begun to do so with instinctive skill.

Life in the uranium republics, however, is not without its vicissitudes. Some six Standard months before, an indifferent electorate had allowed Gruber to stuff his way into the Governor's chair. And Green, his face already mirroring the resignation which comes from living off a sinecure, soon assumed his present look—somewhat akin to that of a shade contemplating its next millennium of damnation.

As head of the patrol—which Gruber had immediately reduced to one man and one aging cutter—he came in for his exorbitant share of abuse every time a Terrestrian cigarette or a Venerian egret feather appeared among the luxury-starved peoples of Libertad without having first yielded its fair mite of tariff to the Governmental coffers.

And, of course, with only one ship available, the patrol—i.e., Green—was totally incapable of controlling the ever-burgeoning rate with which such debilitating fripperies drained the pockets of the austere Libertadenos. Green had made the mistake of hinting that a reinstatement of his recently slashed pay might fire him with greater zeal.

We are already aware of the painful scene which followed. Let us not perturb our sympathies once more . . .

Life might have gone on thus indefinitely, had not a half-keg of staggeringly ancient Scotch passed

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into Green's possession from the one smuggler recently captured. Had Gruber chosen another time to give him his lumps, Green might have allowed inexorable fate to weave its fabrics as it willed, and, eventually, he would simply have dried up and blown away. But hundred-year-old Dewar's is dangerous stuff, and past glories vividly recalled are an awesome catalyst.

The former Colonel of the Terrestrian Rangers sat in a dim corner of his room, one hand fondling the charred oak of the keg, the other supporting his chin. He might have been a figure beaten out of melancholy clay by an over-wrought Rodin . . .

Libertad, like its sister nations, existed by reason of its immense uranium deposits. They paid for the air plant, built the small towns that were actually glorified spaceports, and bought all the other commodities that made it barely attractive enough to keep the mining population from wandering elsewhere. It hung, so to speak, suspended from the steel thread of the lumbering freighters that fed it with their precious cargos, and departed laden with the vitally necessary ore that powered the engines of the mighty Solar Union. Thus, anything which menaced these unglamorous freighters menaced life itself.

Abruptly, the menace was there.

Whoever the pirate was, he had a touch of artistry in his makeup. The slim, deadly black ship sported an utterly superfluous dorsal fin that gave the tiny craft an air of rakish menace totally fitting to its occupation. The entire ship, obviously converted from some patrol craft, breathed menace, swift and final, from every slim line. The twin muzzles of a rocket launching assembly leered from her prow.

The Shark hung in space above the group of freighters, selecting its prey leisurely, while frantic engineers overheated their tubes in desperate efforts to get away. The cluster of six freighters split asunder like quail and floundered off.

Like its namesake, the Shark was among them with a slashing, easy twist of its course. It curved up lazily at the broad belly of the fattest cargo ship and closed rapidly. The terrified crew fumbled at lifeboat airlocks while desperate jetmen cut in every bank they had.

A rocket drew a line of fire across the pitted bow, and then the Shark was past and above them, flipping over in a turning dive at the freighter's exposed back.

Lifecraft vomited from the shuddering vessel's flanks, and the jets died as the black gang scrambled aboard their own boat and cast off. The Shark drifted in to claim her prey.

And then, what came to be known as the luck of the Shark went into effect. Before the pirate could match course and go aboard, the scarlet patrol cutter from Libertad was upon her.

The pirate abruptly went into a

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Ten G turn that must have been sheer hell on her pilot, and cut away at a tangent, with Green's ship close behind her. A proximity fused rocket from the cutter kicked her tail up, and for a moment she flailed wildly across space, then straightened and, without once turning to fight, poured on all her speed.

The cutter disengaged immediately, not wasting time on a futile stern chase, and returned to the re-assembled convoy to ride herd over it until the freighters were safely docked on Libertad.

Green's face wore a satisfied smile for the first time in months as he landed to accept the gratitude —and gratuities—of the shaken shipmasters.

In the year that followed, the pattern repeated itself with almost every convoy. Armed to the teeth and heavily escorted, the freighters made the terrified trip between Terra and Libertad. The black Shark nipped at the pitted flanks, slipping lithely away from the furious escorts that could not match her velocities or bone-brushing maneuvers. Scorching metal here and there with near misses, driving the commanders of escort vessels insane, she slashed at Libertad's lifeline. In that nerve-wracking year, she was never hit, nor was her base found.

Conversely, she never made a kill, for, whenever she did succeed in isolating a ship, Green's patrol cutter was sure to come blazing in and drive her off. This, of course, was much to the discomfiture of the young men in the Terrestrian Spacial Police, who did not dare leave the convoy alone while chasing the Shark. It was also much to the great relief of the freighter captains, who took to bringing Green the little luxuries for which he casually hinted.

Oddly enough, not even the ones who occasionally brought in spare parts designed to fit radio remote control systems ever came to the obvious deduction. The Shark continued to be menacing—and unlucky. Green continued to be vigilant and valiant—and quite content.

Thus, a new status quo established itself in that corner of the asteroid belt. The uranium trade continued to make Libertad prosperous. The Shark merely added a touch of spice to the ordinarily rock-bound life. True, the Terrestrian Spacial Police found itself tying up a number of ships on escort duty. But then, it was a valuable training experience for new recruits. No goods were actually lost in transit, and Green was once again comfortable, both in mind and spirit. Everyone was happy, no one was suffering. An ideal state for affairs to be in.

But we have forgotten Gruber.

Now, Gruber had reacted to Green's increased prowess with no more than a series of grunts—one for each occasion on which a grateful freighter captain or cargo line owner had seen fit to mention the

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patrol lieutenant's diligence to his Governor. Occasionally, he had been heard to mutter some under-the-breath comment, particularly when the lieutenant had averted disaster only by some prodigious etherobatic maneuver in the last nick of time.

But, for a year, he had kept his own counsel, and Green had begun to believe he would continue to do so. Green would not, incidentally, venture an opinion as to *where* Gruber kept his counsel, but he undoubtedly had suggestions which he felt were better unvoiced. The state of relations between them had simmered down to a boiling neutrality.

As it happened, however, elections were just about due to come 'round again. And, out of the pitchblende slags of the nastier part of Libertad, a reform candidate had arisen. There was much talk of the class struggle, decadent political leeches, and the like. Gruber was not insensitive to these things. It was his considered opinion that a wave of administration diligence was in order.

So, once more, Senior Lieutenant Granville Green bowed his head to the storm.

"And furthermore, Lieutenant, you may be making quite a name for yourself playing patta-cake with this Shark, but I don't notice any decrease in smuggling! Do you, Lieutenant? OR DON'T YOU HAVE TIME! May I presume on your precious time, Lieutenant? Thank you. STOP THAT SMUGGLING, LIEUTENANT! Immediately. That's all. Get out."

Thus, Gruber.

But the lieutenant's head was less accustomed to being bowed than it had been. A curious light flickered in his eyes. "Yes, sir," he said, executed a deliberately sloppy about-face, and left the Governor's office with an unholy jauntiness in his stride.

Gruber failed to notice. He had formed his opinion of Lieutenant Green some time before, and an opinion once formed, to Gruber, was as a rock to stand on.

There now occurred a definite change in the activities of the Shark. Freighter crews spoke of it in puzzled tones, and the whole subject became the object of considerable grogshop debate and theorizing. Lieutenant Green's expert opinion was earnestly sought after, but the lieutenant, of course, did not commit himself.

The slashing attacks on the freight convoys had stopped, or, at best, had become merely perfunctory. Slight sops to piratical pride, one might say, as the Shark scurried hither and yon about the asteroids, permitting only an occasional glimpse or two of himself. He darted among the tumbling rocks, bound on some mysterious errand or errands that called for an unremitting series of shuttlings that would have done pride to a commuting service.

Lieutenant Green was constantly

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close behind him. Wherever the Shark went, there the scarlet patrol cutter was sure to go, her warheads exploding around the twisting black ship like so many sunbursts.

It was amazing how many other surreptitious craft those shells flushed out by pure accident. Amazing, how many smugglers suddenly found their hidden byways blundered upon, first by the darting Shark and immediately thereafter by Lieutenant Green, who, of course, took advantage of lucky chance to abandon the demonstrably futile chase after the pirate and take the smugglers into custody.

And it *was* all strictly by accident. The one ship left in the Libertad patrol could never have combed the asteroids as a matter of proper routine, but, inasmuch as the Shark chose to go there, Green could only follow.

The Terrestrian Spacial Police, limited to the bounds of Terra's jurisdiction, could not devote itself to the task. It could only hug the convoys outward bound from Earth. It might, of course, have come to Green's aid in his hunt after the Shark—but each time the police expressed an intention to Green of so doing, the Shark, as though reading their minds, devoted a week or two to his old harrying tactics before once more returning to his new activities. It was most frustrating. On the other hand, the smuggling into Libertad had come to a dead halt.

Oddly enough, Gruber's reaction was unprintable here. One would have expected something different.

One might have, but Lieutenant Green did not seem to. He showed no sign of shock at the Governor's railings and excoriations. He contented himself with pointing out that he had made the series of arrests by sheer accident.

An unprejudiced observer might have noticed that Lieutenant Green was acting as though he had known all along who was, in fact, in charge of the smuggling ring. Further, he acted as though he had always known precisely why Gruber had chosen to retain the one presumably ineffectual member of the patrol after assuming the Governorship. After all, could anyone blame Gruber if his forthrightly—so forthrightly!—expressed commands had not been carried out by an incompetent officer?

It was a very equivocal position for Gruber to find himself in. It became plainly even more so when Green casually mentioned that a complete summary of the situation was on file at the Libertad National Bank and Trust Company, available to all upon the lieutenant's death. Particularly upon his death of violent causes.

Gruber unclenched his fists and resumed his chair. Lieutenant Green readjusted his rumpled collar and smiled gently. He walked casually out of the office and spent the remainder of the day in his

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quarters, sipping warmly of hundred-year-old Scotch and pleasant imaginings.

It was, coincidentally enough, election day on Libertad when the Stark harried his last convoy.

For a week now, ever since Lieutenant Green's latest interview with the incumbent Governor, the Shark had been back at his old habits, pushing his attacks even more daringly than before, the explosions of his rockets crashing off the battered hulls of the cargo ships. Glancingly, thank Providence.

And thank Lieutenant Green, too, for, at last, he seemed to be solving the secret of the pirate's brilliant maneuverings. If the Shark was bold, Green was bolder. If the Shark twisted alarmingly near the nose of a freighter as he rolled away from the attack, the scarlet cutter fairly scraped metal as it dove after him. Savage as the Shark's lunges might be, he could not hold a steady course long enough to fire accurately. The cutter hounded him unmercifully.

The tales of combat in space that the docking freighters brought to Libertad were enough to make the most seasoned spacehand turn pale. When the cutter landed each day, after a nerve-jellying dogfight in which first the Shark and then the lieutenant seemed certain of explosive death, Green was mobbed by anxious miners, eager to hear whether he had at last accomplished his unequal task. Each time, the lieutenant would shake his head. But one could see that, in those firm lips, in those uncompromising eyes, there was determination and ever-growing knowledge that the end must come soon. His very silence proclaimed it.

The election seemed tame as an alternative subject of interest.

And on that fateful day, the Shark misjudged. For one split-second too long, the slim black ship hesitated at the top of an attack curve.

Green caught the pirate squarely in his sights at last, and the Shark fountained into incandescent debris above the madly cheering convoy. Crisply, its job well done, the scarlet cutter turned for home, leading the convoy in . . .

The spacefield was edged by a seething mob of hysterical Libertadenos. As the cutter landed, all semblance of discipline disappeared from the crowd, and it poured over the pitted tarmac. Green was hoisted to the shoulders of as many men as could cluster under him, and the only sound intelligible for miles was *Green! Green! Green!*

Logically enough, after someone had asked the quiet hero what he desired as a reward, that seemed to be the only name the tally clerks could read on the ballots for Governor, as well.

* * *

Governor-elect Granville Green settled himself into the still-warm chair behind what had been Gru-

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ber's desk. He sighed with pleased satisfaction.

"Ahh! Most comfortable." He toyed with the elaborate desk blotter. "How convenient!" he mused in happy abstraction. "It will not even be necessary to alter the initials on the gubernatorial silver!" He leaned back, and smiled.

Former Governor Gruber glowered at him, standing on the other side of the desk. Red rage flickered at the corners of his eyes, and it is to be feared that his muffled ejaculations were not sufficiently respectful toward the office which he had himself so recently dignified.

"What are your plans, Gruber?" Green asked solicitously.

Gruber rasped a unintelligible sentence ending in ". . . go to blank blank hell!"

Green shook his head. "Oh, I wouldn't do *that,* if I were you!" He bit his lip in thought. "I'll tell you what—there's an opening in the patrol. The pay isn't very much, but—" He smiled deprecatingly. "No. No, that would hardly suit. Not without some additional source of income. Well, now," he mused, "how would you like to buy the piracy concession?"

There followed an at first bewildered, then incredulous, then heated discussion with Gruber. But it closed amicably enough, once Green had impressed on Gruber that no one would ever believe his wild and vengeful accusations against the upright man who had succeeded to his former office.

So, it was not long before the Tiger appeared above the space-lanes. Gleaming bronze, the pirate waited in the shadow of a solitary asteroid, and, as the fleet passed below, pounced.

But the Tiger was cut of different stuff than the legendary Shark. He made the error of actually smashing a gap in the hull of a lumbering freighter, and then matching courses and attempting to board. The men of the Terrestrian Spacial Police, smarting beyond all human endurance, blew him to fragments.

And so Green sat alone in his quiet office, enjoying a succession of re-elections, and there he lived, in tranquility and comfort, happily ever after.

If good writing means anything—you'll find it; if great stories mean anything—you'll find them; if famed authors mean anything—you'll find them; if first stories by new, promising young writers mean anything—you'll find them—in every FANTASTIC UNIVERSE. *Witness—Asimov, Anderson, del Rey, Sturgeon, Sheckley, Morrison, Evelyn E. Smith and many others—in the next issue!*

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all were monsters

by... Manly Wade Wellman

The man from the stars bore the human race no ill will. Why was he greeted by a host of monsters?

"I'VE WATCHED you in the sky," I whispered, staring in shocked disbelief at the humanoid male from the little space ship. "For three nights, with my telescope." I gestured toward the roof where the instrument stood. "I made it myself, and I can see the rings of Saturn and Jupiter's moons. I live alone on this farm, and—" I stopped abruptly, telling myself I was quite mad to think that he could understand me.

"Oh, but I can," he said instantly. In the gloom he looked just the way you'd expect an inhabitant of another world *would* look, from his long, thin, snug-garmented arms and legs to his high domed forehead. "I know how to communicate telepathically with your kind," he said.

That made sense, but the rest of it didn't. "I can't believe it," I said. "The first ship from another world! Why didn't the big observatories report on your coming?"

"They didn't see me," was his measured reply.

"But if my crude, homemade telescope picked you out—"

Like the Darwins and the Huxleys the Wellmans have a quite remarkable record of family accomplishment. Manly Wade's dad is an internationally famous medical pioneer, painter and writer and his brother, Paul, has achieved outstanding recognition as a best-selling historical novelist. But it is Manly himself we are concerned with here, and his by no means inconsiderable literary talents. There's a bitter-bright eerie wonderment in this unusual little yarn.

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"I didn't *want* them to see me," he explained patiently. "Too much attention would have been exhausting. I wanted to start, quietly, with you. Long before I set down on your world I decided on you, with your telescope and your lonely home out here away from any densely populated area. Let's go in."

As I led him toward my back door I still couldn't grasp it. He looked too patly like the popular conception of a creature from another planet.

"You can't grasp it," he said. "I look too patly like the popular conception of a creature from another planet."

"You can read my mind?" I gasped, forgetting that he'd just informed me that he had telepathic powers.

"And I can speak your language. As to my appearance—I have adopted a synthetic disguise to avoid startling you too much. If you saw and heard me as I really am, you'd refuse to believe in my existence."

I opened the kitchen door for him. Inside, his snug garments shone metal-bright. He had large, glowing eyes, and his thin face seemed inscrutably observant and somehow very wise. Just as I closed the door behind us, he goggled upward, and shrank back as though terrified.

"What's *that*?" he gasped.

"A moth," I replied. "It was drawn to the electric light."

Snatching the little creature out of the air, I crushed it in my fingers and dropped it on the table.

"You did that almost instinctively," he said. "And ruthlessly."

"It was only a moth," I said.

"That was the first time I ever saw a violent death," he told me. "I'd heard of it, but only as it happens on your world. You see, we've studied you, far across space, but we didn't know you had these little living things—moths, as you call them."

Looking at him, I wondered if he really was what he claimed to be—an inhabitant of another world.

"I'll convince you," he read my mind again, "and you'll help me convince others. I have thought of a way to make you believe—a scientific way. Gold-making puzzles you, doesn't it?"

He seated himself at the kitchen table, and drew toward him a tarnished fork. From his belt-pouch he took a small object resembling a salt-shaker and sprinkled dull dust on the utensil. Pouching the shaker, he produced a tiny black vial and carefully trickled liquid on the dust. He twiddled the fork briefly, then held it out. It gleamed yellow, and weighed heavy in my hand. To outward appearance, at least, it was gold.

"What else?" he asked. "Restoring the dead to life?"

Again he produced a vial, and shook a single drop of yellow liquid on the crushed body of the

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moth. From a tiny syringe, he blew a cloud of vapor. Finally he turned a red glow, like a miniature flashlight, on the insect. Then he shrank back in his chair, for the moth had stirred, and was fluttering up to the light.

Again I swiftly caught and crushed it, and he relaxed.

"You're afraid of your own gift of life," I said.

He shook his big head. "We've studied only your civilized race. We knew of no other living things —uncivilized, uncontrolled. Forgive me if I seem nervous."

"How did you study us?" I asked.

Close-mouthed, he smiled. "We use mechanisms of awareness. Without optical or auditory experience of you we have familiarized ourselves with even your slipshod, fantastic notions about other worlds. That is why I look and speak as I do, to conform with your notions. I even rigged my vehicle to resemble your mental picture of a spaceship, recognizable to your preconception. I can even achieve complete invisibility. I'll show myself only to scholars and scientists of your choosing."

"What name shall I give you?" I asked.

"You could not speak my real name. You may call me Provvorr. That sounds like the name of someone from another world—to you."

"Where is your world, Provvorr?" I asked. "What is it like?"

"It's far from your System. We'll reach a point of en rapportment which will enable you to understand its location. But it is more important that I first know about you."

I sat down opposite him. "Do you intend to make war upon us?" I asked. "Have you drawn up a plan of conquest?"

Shaking his head, he smiled again. "We have no such plan. We don't understand killing and conquering. But when I bring my people back, we must understand how to survive here. Our world is overcrowded, exhausted. We'll colonize this one."

"But you just said," I reminded him gently, "that you didn't want to conquer us."

Again he smiled. "When we come back you won't be here, any of you. Our observers give your race something like two of your decades in which to destroy yourselves."

I looked at him in tight-lipped silence. It was no new idea. Most thinking people agree that we're on the doorstep of self-extermination. But Provvorr came out with it so facilely, like someone who knows that an apartment will be vacant for him by the first of the month. Only a quite insane mind—

"I'm completely sane," he assured me.

"You can predict the future. Is that it?"

"Anyone can predict the future who makes a careful, scientific study of the present and the past.

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Your race will be gone, except for a few scattered survivors, by the time I bring back enough of my people to populate this world."

He looked at me as he spoke.

"Is there no hope for us then?" I asked. Then I realized with horror that I was accepting his prediction at face value, and almost shouted at him. "This is our world. Do you hear? Ours, not yours."

"Why begrudge it to me and mine after you leave it empty?" he asked. Then he started violently, staring. "What's that?"

My sharp voice had summoned Skip, my bull terrier. Entering the kitchen, he stationed himself beside the stove, and he looked at Provvorr.

"It's just my dog," I said. "He always gets excited when I raise my voice."

"This isn't at all what I expected," Provvorr said shakily.

Skip stood stiff-legged a yard from Provvorr, and growled almost savagely.

"Get him out of here," Provvorr pleaded.

"Down, Skip," I commanded. "That's it, old fellow. Calm now—" Skip sat down, his eyes still on Provvorr. "There, he won't harm you," I said. "He knows you're frightened, and that makes him foolhardy."

"But I tried to go invisible," Provvorr said. "I tried to vanish completely from his consciousness. It should have worked, but—he *knows* I'm here."

Provvorr quivered. I stared at him, amazed. "I thought you had pretty thorough impressions of our world."

"Only of your chief activities and preoccupations. Nothing about the hideous, monstrous creatures you call dogs."

"Perhaps we take dogs too much for granted," I said. "We should not. They're our friends."

"But they're so—so repellently alien," he protested. "Not your kind at all."

I stared at him. "Don't you have pets and other animals on your world?"

"My people are the only inhabitants," he explained. "Once there were others—strange and terrifyingly different. So long ago that we see only their remains in our sedimentary rocks."

His shoulders twitched nervously. I recalled how he'd acted about the moth, and began to understand the creepy strangeness which was making him quake.

"Are there many dogs like this one?" he asked apprehensively.

"Almost everybody has a dog," I replied. "Or a cat."

"What is a cat?" he asked, but there was no need for me to enlighten him.

Oscar strolled in after Skip, a four-footed perambulating muff. He sat beside Skip, his green eyes on Provvorr. He purred like an outboard motor. I thought Provvorr would leap out through the window glass.

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"A cat," he said. "You keep him for—what purpose?"

I tried to be reassuring. "Just for his company and respectability. Of course, he catches mice."

"What are mice?"

As I told him, his face grew tense and sick.

"All are monsters," he said. "Your world breeds a horrible variety of abnormal creatures. We thought you were like us—a single living species, subduing a planet to your will. These other things are—uncivilized."

I was quite sure the word didn't mean exactly what he wanted it to mean. Skip and Oscar were civilized enough, if it came to that. I think he meant that they were uncanny, beyond those mechanisms of awareness he was accustomed to.

"They won't hurt you," I assured him. "Watch while I feed them. You'll see how friendly they are."

I took a plate of left-over pork roast from the refrigerator and with a sharp kitchen knife I shaved off scraps. Oscar and Skip accepted the repast with well-bred relish.

"What are they eating?" Provvorr wanted to know.

"Meat," I said. "Animal food—pork."

"We make our food from the elements," Provvorr said.

"Synthetics," I nodded, understandingly. "You'd have to, with no domestic food animals."

"From what animal does that food come?"

I described a pig. Then in more colorful detail, a steer. He drummed his tapering fingers on the table.

"Your world swarms with hideous life," he repeated.

"It all depends on how you look at it," I said. "We're used to it."

"I'm not."

"Therefore it gives you the creeps. The way I'd feel in a roomful of snakes."

"What are snakes?"

I told him. He asked more questions, and I spoke of rabbits that scampered across fields; of fish swarming in streams, and lakes and oceans; of birds in the air; elephants and lions and tigers. He listened, in a silence that grew ever more ominous around him.

"Your planet is infested," he said. "This is terrible."

"Why terrible?" I asked, really wanting to know.

He looked sidelong at Skip and Oscar, their sharp white teeth busy with the pork. "Monsters can't be rationalized. I can't read their minds. I can't disappear from them. They are utterly new to my experience."

They really are terrifying to him, I thought. *Like ghosts . . .*

"What are ghosts?" he demanded, instantly.

"Strange, mysterious beings that ignorant people believe in," I said. "Spirits of dead creatures, of evil intelligences, lurking and spying, ready to do harm."

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"Are they animals," said Provvorr.

"No," I told him. "Ghosts are imaginary. Animals are real."

"Animals," he said, "are evil intelligences, lurking and spying, ready to do harm."

"Nonsense, Provvorr," I tried to reassure him. "Animals know us for their masters. We've won mastery over them."

"But your race kills and conquers," he said. "Mine doesn't. That's why these creatures don't think I'm a master. And when your race destroys itself, these other races will remain here—"

He rose, shrinking away from Skip and Oscar. "Have you a light to show me to my ship?" he asked.

I took a flashlight and escorted him from the house. Skip and Oscar watched us from the door, in quiet unconcern.

Out in the field beside his ship, Provvorr looked wan in the flashlight's beam. "Good-bye," he said. "We won't attempt to colonize this monster-thronged world. It's as you said. We would feel as you would feel among snakes. I can understand that feeling as it is registered in your mind."

"Then," I said, "if my race ends the way you say, the world will belong to animals. Perhaps dogs will rule—or cats, or mice. Home folks, anyway. Maybe they'll do better than we could ever hope to do."

"Since we won't come here," said Provvorr, "would you like to know how to avoid destroying yourself?"

"How?" I cried eagerly.

His smile was tight as he studied me carefully. "When I tell you, it will seem simple."

And how simple it seemed as he told me, just before he left. So simple, the way to stop wars and conquests and destruction—I hope it won't sound ridiculous when I pass it on to the United Nations.

If you live within a thousand-mile radius of New York City you won't want to miss THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY FANVET CONVENTION *on Sunday, April 17, 1955, at Werdermann's Hall, 3rd Avenue and East 16th Street. There is no admission charge and the doors open at twelve noon. Just sign the register, walk in, and meet—most of New York's science fiction editors, writers, artists and prominent fans. There'll even be a science fantasy film.*

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paradise preserved

by . . . Dal Stivens

Centaur was a big wheel in Mr. Lotus' Alice-in-Wonderland kind of world. How could he know the stranger would cheat him of Alice?

THE SERENE blue sky of Planet 37 in Galaxy 3 cracked open with the roar of the approaching rocket. The flamingoes shuttered up off the green lake, eland jack-knifed it up the blue hills. The silver rocket with a corona of red fire playing round its stern came in fast over the villa and then sheered up on its tail, prior to landing.

"Damn!" cried Mr. Lotus.

"Botheration!" said Mrs. Lotus.

And together they cried, "You said we'd get away from it all here."

And together again, they flung at each other, "You did!"

"The Indiarubber Man!" they said, and, "Nothing but visitors. Last week the Selenites. No sooner had they gone than it was the Ledas."

"He'll ruin my dahlias!" said Mr. Lotus.

The rocket backed down slowly to the Earth, poking out its stern like a horse settling in a stall. Red blasts scorched a circle in the flower beds.

"I'll have to cook all the week-end!" said Mrs. Lotus.

The Indiarubber Man bounced

If you were moved to tears and Grecian merriment by Dal Stivens' ironically tender little story of the racehorse who loved everybody but wasn't loved in return prepare yourself for another imaginative treat of the very first magnitude. Mr. Stivens has done it again, with a set of characters as goofy-strange and likeable as a rubber-tusked walrus with a golden heart.

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down the gangway. He looked about five feet high.

"What gives?" he cried happily. "Lead me to a feed. I always work up an appetite in space."

Mr. and Mrs. Lotus smiled wanly.

"Nice place you've got here," went on the Indiarubber Man. He belonged to the wiry, ugly race on a neighboring planet, 80,000,000 miles away. The Indiarubber Man's body was in the position of rest. It looked round and so did his gray forearms showing out of the gray robe, caught in at the waist by a green belt.

"Lovely flowers!" he cried and elongated his body until it was ten feet high in order to get a better view. His pyknic head had become schizoid.

"Makes me melancholy to stay like this too long," he said mournfully. He retracted to a round extroverted ball. "More myself!" he exulted, thumping his chest. "You two have the right idea to get away from civilization and plant yourselves down on this little uninhabited island in space. How's the novel? How's the painting? Guess you folks are rattling through the work?" The Indiarubber Man breathed in deeply. "God's pure air. A week of it will do me good."

Mr. and Mrs. Lotus looked deep groans at each other. The Indiarubber Man advanced with springy steps and energetically shook hands with his chosen hosts. His voice rang heartily while he declaimed, "Look a bit peaky, both of you. I'll take you in hand. Long bouncy walks for both of you will be the cure."

The Indiarubber Man began jigging up and down as he spoke. He began to leave the ground, first by a foot and then by a yard. Soon he was clearing five and then ten feet, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five feet, with each bounce.

"See, I'm as fit as a fiddle!" cried the Indiarubber Man.

"For what?" asked Mr. Lotus, rudely.

"Beg pardon," said the Indiarubber Man.

Mrs. Lotus jogged her elbow into Mr. Lotus.

"How high?" said Mr. Lotus.

"No limit," said the Indiarubber Man, striking the rose-bed and soaring up to one hundred feet. "No limit."

"Could be dangerous," said Mr. Lotus, glaring at the rose-bed.

"Not it," said the Indiarubber Man, as he switched on his radiotelephonic set. He was now reaching five hundred feet. "I've been issued with a gravity belt. That's the green one I've got on. They are issued to all athletes in our universe when they reach this degree of skill."

The Indiarubber Man bounced up swiftly in a series of leaps to five and then ten thousand feet and then reduced his bouncing swiftly. He beat a rapid tat-tat on the remaining flower beds and then joggled to a stop.

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"Wonderful performance," said Mr. Lotus. "Just as well you have that belt though." Mr. Lotus grew suddenly reflective.

"I work steadily at my bouncing," said the Indiarubber Man. "Still a man can be too hearty." He elongated himself to six feet ten inches. "A better balance now. Sorry, old man, about your flower beds. I'll set them right tomorrow."

"Please don't bother," said Mr. Lotus.

"No trouble."

"Come for a swim," said Mr. Lotus and led the way to the lake.

The Indiarubber Man shrank to four feet six. "Whacko!" he cried. "The pensive life doesn't suit me."

"Strip to the buff!" said Mr. Lotus.

Mrs. Lotus looked at her husband, gasping.

"All!" said Mr. Lotus. Mrs. Lotus, blushing, began to obey.

"Swimming is best in the buff," said the Indiarubber Man, peeling off his gray robe.

He capered on the turf in a series of little jigs. Mr. Lotus crept silently behind him and threw his foot hard at the spot where the Indiarubber Man protruded most. The Indiarubber Man bellowed. He flew up off Mr. Lotus's foot. He came down and bounced up again.

"I say, old man!" he cried. He went up to ten feet, fell and soared to fifteen, twenty.

"Old man—" The Indiarubber Man went on bouncing. In five minutes he was bouncing to fifteen thousand feet, still protesting. In twenty minutes he bounced out of Planet 37's gravitational pull.

Mr. Lotus rubbed his toes gratefully. "Blessed quiet," he said.

"Will he be all right?"

"Indestructible," said Mr. Lotus.

The flamingoes came back hopefully to the green lake; the eland jittered down the blue hills; Mr. Lotus spread out the MSS of his novel and Mrs. Lotus set up her easel.

The blue sky quivered and jumped. Down knifed a brash silver rocket.

"Oh, no!" groaned Mr. and Mrs. Lotus.

"Centaur!" cried Mr. Lotus. "It's too much."

"He's not so bad as some," said Mrs. Lotus. "He's rather nice."

Mr. Lotus's eyebrows went up. "They're all bad," he said firmly.

"Centaur could be fun—if we weren't busy, I mean," said Mrs. Lotus. "He's so full of high spirits."

"Too much for my taste," said Mr. Lotus and shot a black look at his slim, dark, beautiful wife.

Down the ramp from his space ship trotted Centaur, his hooves clattering, his full-muscled thighs gleaming blue-black in the sunlight, his Arab neck arched, his nostrils flaring, teeth gleaming. He paced up to Mr. and Mrs. Lotus and held out his hand to both in turn. His black eye roved over lovely Mrs. Lotus.

"It's wonderful to feel the turf

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under my hooves!" he cried, proud neck bent over Mrs. Lotus's little hand while he kissed it gallantly and held it, perhaps, a trifle too long. "Even on short trips I get claustrophobia," he said and laughed. His white corsair teeth gleamed and he stroked a black, curling beard.

Centaur came from another planet in Galaxy 53, just over 100,000,000 miles away.

"Nice primitive little planet, this," he said. "How wise you two are! I like to be primitive." He cocked a raffish eyebrow. "Come for a gallop over the hills you two! I'll carry you on my back."

"I don't feel the slightest bit athletic," said Mr. Lotus coldly. "Exercise of any kind bores me."

"It's good for you," said Centaur. "Perhaps your wife would like a ride?"

"I don't think she would," Mr. Lotus said, slowly.

"I think I might," said Mrs. Lotus. "You come too, darling."

Mr. Lotus shook a darkling head.

"Then I will," said Mrs. Lotus and she vaulted on to Centaur's back.

"Bravo for you!" cried Centaur. He haut-ecoled about the lawn, spun on his haunches and then fleered up the green hills with Mrs. Lotus laughing and clinging to his mane.

"Damnation!" said Mr. Lotus.

Centaur and Mrs. Lotus were away one hour, two hours. Mr. Lotus's face grew darker. He did not see the silent black rocket which backed down on the lawn with a whisper. A tall, bearded man, dressed in black, spoke at his elbow:

"Excuse me—"

Mr. Lotus stared at him and then at the strange old-fashioned spaceship. "I did not hear you—" he broke off. "I recognize you now."

The visitor nodded. "That's me. Landing is not in the program but the power seemed to falter so I tried to see if I could land and I found I could. It's an outside chance but is there any hope?"

"Nothing doing!" said Mr. Lotus. "And now you can take off smartly."

"Can't I persuade you? She's a good ship." The visitor's speech was thick and guttural.

"No!" said Mr. Lotus loudly. And even more loudly, "No!! Take off! I'm sick to death of visitors, of people blowing in, of the Indiarubber Man, of Centaur—" Mr. Lotus looked towards the blue hills and exploringly rubbed the top of his head. "Push off!"

"I've got fifty thousand Dutch guilders," said the bearded man. "And some fine schnapps."

Mr. Lotus ran into the villa and came back with a ray pistol. He pointed it at the visitor. "I give you ten seconds."

The man in black shrugged his shoulders and resignedly walked over to his ship. Mr. Lotus watch-

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ed. Then he put the pistol in his pocket and ran forward crying: "No! Don't go! Wait!"

The bearded man turned.

"I have an idea," said Mr. Lotus. "Come back."

Ten minutes later Mr. Lotus was saying to the bearded man, as together they peered into the black rocket: "But it's incredibly primitive. That power drive is positively antique. I've only seen one in the museums."

"My rocket is five hundred years old," shrugged the visitor. "But durable."

"A real early model," said Mr. Lotus.

The visitor said stiffly, "A fine ship in its day and it still sails well. And I have no mechanical troubles at all." He laughed sardonically.

"I should imagine not," said Mr. Lotus, amused. "A perpetual power drive and it requires no crew. Sailing itself . . ."

Exuberant hooves swelled up in their ears. Along the edge of the green lake towards them galloped Centaur with pennant tail flapping in the wind and delighted Mrs. Lotus clinging to his neck. Centaur reverberated up to them, haunches flashing, hooves flickering, wheeled round them, curvetted, and tensed to a stop.

"Wonderful jaunt, Lotus!" he exulted, black eyes flashing patronage at Mr. Lotus.

"You should have come, dear," said Mrs. Lotus, with sparkling cheeks. Then shyly she looked away from her husband.

"I should have," said Mr. Lotus coldly.

Centaur's hooves twinkled as he moved restlessly. He drew his beard to a gleaming point.

"Why, what's this?" Centaur cried. He pranced towards the black rocket. "Where did this jalopy come from?"

"If you'd care to inspect it—" suggested the bearded owner.

Centaur high-stepped it to the craft. He beat a tattoo up the gangway. Mr. Lotus moved swiftly behind him. Centaur reached the top of the gangway and craned his neck to see inside. Mr. Lotus drew back his foot and kicked Centaur very hard.

"A veritable ant—" Centaur choked as he swallowed the rest of the word. He went head first into the black rocket, hooves clattering on the steel. Mr. Lotus threw up the gangway and slammed the door hard.

"I'm not quite sure this could be described as 'persuaded,'" he confided to the bearded man. "We'll just have to wait."

The black rocket quivered silently and then with a gentle sigh-like sound it rose into the air. It went up swiftly and quietly as a summer breeze.

"It was apparently satisfactory," said Mr. Lotus, smiling.

The rocket was five hundred feet up and the watchers on the ground

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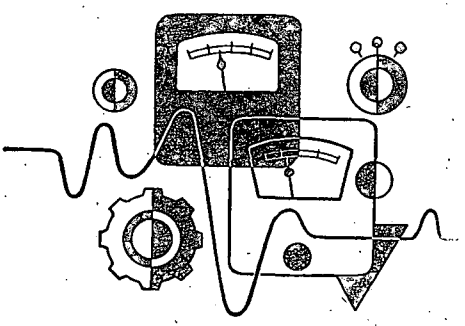
heard Centaur trumpeting his annoyance.

Mr. Lotus turned to Mrs. Lotus. "We have a visitor, Alice my dear, who will be staying here for a little while before moving on. Allow me to present—"

"Your wit is heavy," cut in Mrs. Lotus. "I know who he is now and you can entertain him yourself!"

She ran into the villa. "He can have his damned Flying Dutchman all to himself," she told her pillow angrily.



This seems to be the season of conventions and very newsworthy gatherings they are. In addition to the New York City Fanvets Convention, mentioned elsewhere in this issue, a very lively conference is scheduled for April 2 and 3 at the Hotel Dinkler-Plaza in Atlanta, Georgia. Famed science fantasy writer Wilson "Bob" Tucker will preside at the banquet, and science fantasy notables from all over the Southeast and Midwest will attend. Write for details to Ian Macauley, Director, 57 East Park Lane, Atlanta 5, Georgia.

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inferiority complex

by . . . Evan Hunter

A neighborly, happy fellow was Field. He liked Gray—but why did the fool keep nibbling at the dark edge of the monstrous?

FIELD WAS, in many respects, just such a fellow as you and I. He had a good heart, and a good appetite. He had in addition very sharp eyes, and he was still quite fast, and of good breath, considering his age.

He lived in a fairly decent neighborhood, the corner of Beam and Crossway, if you're familiar with it, and the walls that made up his home were snug and secure. His home was oil-heated.

He had a nice family, a wife and three children, the oldest of whom had left home to settle nearby. Field was implicitly faithful to his wife, and there was nothing he would not do for her. Nor had he any reason to believe she was not just as true to him. He worked at night, mostly, and a night worker might sometimes have doubts about his wife's habits. But Field did not doubt.

He was then, like you and me, a fellow who had come along in years, fairly prosperous, a fellow who had managed to avoid the various traps and pitfalls which life presents, a fellow who was happily secure within the walls of his own little world.

Field did not think of other worlds.

When Evan Hunter, a quite young writer with a miraculous gift for selling stories to all of the science-fiction magazines while signing impressive Hollywood contracts, explores the scientific possibilities in the field, as it were, you're sure to be carried starward on wings of pulsing brightness, even when the universe tilts, as it does here, and there's a Mr. Field.

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Oh perhaps, yes. Oh sometimes, maybe. Sometimes when there were strange rumblings in the blackness of the night, he would look up and wonder. And he would envision a superior race somewhere, a race watching him, a race waiting—but he would shrug these thoughts aside, smile securely and go about his business.

There were fellows in the neighborhood who believed all sorts of nonsense. These fellows seemed actually anxious for an alien race to suddenly appear. These fellows had built the myth of superior beings somewhere into a thing that was almost supernatural. Field was not one of these crackpots. Field controlled his own destiny, and if he sometimes looked up and wondered, it was a normal wonder, the same wonder you and I share when we gaze up at the endless stars on a black black night, that sort of wonder.

Considering his frame of mind then, it was curious that the topic of conversation should swing to other worlds and alien beings on the night that Gray dropped in.

Gray was a mousy-looking fellow with a thin moustache and brown-almost-black eyes. He was a bit long-winded on occasion, but nonetheless a pleasant sort of chap with interesting theories and stories. So Field welcomed him into his home and made him comfortable, hoping at the same time that he would not ramble on endlessly. Field worked nights, and he hated to speed departing guests. This always seemed rude to him, even though he was painfully aware that business is, after all, business.

They talked of this and that for a while, and Field's wife served something to eat, and they all nibbled at it and felt very warm and comfortable together.

"This is nice," Gray said after a while. "This family life. Sometimes I regret not having a mate." He nodded pompously, and Field shrugged because he had never particularly cared for Gray's flowery way of saying things.

"Yes," he said, "it is nice."

"And yet," Gray said, "sometimes I wonder."

"About what?" Field asked.

"Don't you ever wonder?"

"Sometimes."

"About . . . what's out there?" He made a vague gesture with his head, and Field followed the gesture and looked up and out.

"If you start thinking about things like that," Field said, "you can lose your mind. There are so many possibilities."

"I suppose so," Gray said, wearily, "Still . . ."

"You're not one of these crackpots, are you?" Field asked, smiling. "You don't believe a superior race is going to reach down and squash us all some day, do you?"

Gray looked a little embarrassed. "Well . . ."

"Why, I do believe you are!" Field said, surprised.

"Maybe not squash us," Gray

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said mildly. "But I do believe we'll make contact with a superior race some day."

"Oh, bosh," Field said.

"No, seriously. I mean, hang it all, there have been reports, you know. Sightings, and all that. That's all part of the record, Field. History."

"History, my foot!" Field said.

"You can scoff, if you like, but history is history. If you put all the reports together, you get a picture. And the picture definitely indicates life somewhere out there."

"Intelligent life?" Field asked skeptically.

"Yes. Superior intelligent life."

"I can't believe that," Field said. He shook his head emphatically, the same way you or I might when presented with something so preposterous.

Gray shrugged. "All right, believe what you like. The trouble is, there are too many people like you."

"How do you mean?" Field asked.

"People who laugh at the idea. People who live in their own secure little homes and joke about it. Well, I hope those people aren't surprised some day. I hope when the invasion comes . . ."

"Invasion? Oh, really, Gray . . ."

"Yes, invasion!" Gray said stoutly. "You think there won't be one? You think we'll be able to sit down and talk to these aliens? You think they'll understand us? They may be horrible to look at, they may speak in a different tongue, they may consider us . . ." Gray searched for a word. "Inferior! They may consider us nothing! Can you understand that, Field?"

"No," Field said disgustedly. "I cannot, Gray."

"You can't? You really can't? Suppose they came, Field. Suppose they finally came and wanted all this for themselves. Do you think they'd listen to anything we have to say? We could squeal all we wanted to, and they'd laugh and *pouf!* Good-bye, all of us."

"Good-bye, eh?" Field asked, chuckling. "Just like that. With some superior weapon, I suppose."

"Exactly. If they're superior beings, as the reports show them to be, they'll have superior weapons, something we could never even guess at. *Pouf;* and it'll be all over."

Field chuckled some more and then patted Gray on the shoulder. "You worry too much," he said. "If there *are* superior beings, let them come. I'm not afraid.

"Until they're here," Gray said mournfully. "And then fear won't do any good, anyway."

Field shook his head in amusement. "Trouble with you, Gray," he said, "is that you have an inferiority complex." He chuckled again and added, "I've got to get to work. Getting late."

Gray sighed heavily. "I'll walk you up," he said. Field kissed his wife good-bye, and then looked in on the children. He promised to be home early, and then he and Gray left, parting at the corner.

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It was a dark night, but very warm, and Field was anxious to get to work. He walked quickly and softly, his eyes penetrating the darkness. There was an excitement within him, the same excitement he always felt, and he thought again of what Gray had said, and chuckled softly in the darkness. Superior beings indeed! Superior weapons indeed! *Pouf!*

He chuckled again and probed the deep darkness with his senses.

There! Ah, yes, there. His nostrils quivered in anticipation. Quickly, soundlessly, he set to work.

He reached for the cheese, and the weight of his nose pressed on the bait lever. The lever, depressed, released the bar connecting with the spring mechanism of the trap.

And Field Mouse, reacting in much the same way that you and I might, never knew what hit him.

Let 'em roll off your tongue—ISAAC ASIMOV, THEODORE STURGEON, LESTER DEL REY, POUL ANDERSON, WILLIAM MORRISON, ROBERT SHECKLEY—*as they boldly trespass on the frontiers of tomorrow in next month's triumphant issue of* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE—*the magazine that adds a dozen great yarns to your prized archives of stories worth collecting—and in each and every issue.*

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the loneliest town

by . . . Max Dancey

Gator's time travel experiments completely closed out a very important line of research. He closed out a few other things too.

WHEN I CAN'T stand myself any longer I go to the library. Unhappily, that's quite often.

I get a well-worn copy of what I think of as *the journal,* retire to a quiet corner, and read it again. It doesn't help much.

The volume has a reasonably unwieldly title: *The Journal of Willems Gator's Attempts at Time Travel, a Definitive Work to Prove the Impossibility of Travel into the Future.*

Then, there's the sub-title: *The 9,387 Attempts of Willems Gator to Project Himself into a Future Time, and the Failure of the Efforts Leading to the Proof Positive.*

It's a heavy book. *Weighty,* which suggests more *weighted* or *loaded,* would perhaps be a better adjective.

I turn the pages, skimming and scanning, now digging deeper, reading in certain thumb-worn spots to jog my memory, and in others to fill in my memory.

It isn't an original edition, of course. All of the original copies must have crumbled away in the more than one thousand years since the twentieth century, when the

This is one of those around-and-around stories that come out in quite the most astonishing places, putting to shame even Lewis Carroll's Father William. When you've read it once and then three or four times in sheer delight we're sure you'll ask for more, precisely as did Oliver Twist a century before the gifted Max Dancey took up his truly scintillating pen.

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book was first published. However, it matters little, for the material is there. It's the words that are important, for they carried the spirit of the dream.

Our library has reading wires of the original reviews of the book. Sometimes I run through them before reading the book again, sometimes after a reading. It always helps me in my search for other, larger perspectives.

I admire those early reviewers—with one or two exceptions. Fair-minded men they were, regardless of what they thought of Willems Gator's ambition. If they didn't share the vision, at least they seemed to admire the intensity of effort with which the man tried to bring his dream to life.

Perhaps those reviewers were all staggered by the thoroughness of Gator's approach. More than one reviewer called the book a tribute to all men who had labored toward some great achievement. Here was a lad who wouldn't give up until he had proved his dream to be either realizable—or impossible.

No easy task, surely.

The text of the book was taken directly from the journals of the experiments. There was no author's comment, beyond that recorded at the time of each experiment. And, of course, the further comment that made up the title and sub-title of the book . . .

Willems Gator was eighteen when he first saw, as a young electronics major, the one path that beckoned invitingly toward possible travel into the future.

Within a week he noted in the journal the details of the first experiment.

Arbitrarily, he had selected the date of January 1, 3000 A.D. as the time of his arrival in the future. One reviewer commented on his courage in using himself as the subject. "He had no desire," the reviewer said, "to conduct the experiments with inanimate objects, or even with rabbits. Here was a man who knew what he wanted, had faith in what he could do, and was willing to put his body where his mind was."

That, to me, summed it up.

After his first experiment, Gator was no less convinced of the soundness of his reasoning. After he threw the switch, that first time, he knew he should have found himself in the year 3,000. That he still found himself in 1975 was no reflection on his basic thinking, but only, somehow, on his equipment.

That same evening he rebuilt the equipment twice, and before the night was over the third attempt found him still in 1975.

There was an inheritance that made the experiments possible for Gator. However, after the first few months he had to drop his schooling so as to have more time and money available for the experiments.

Before the end of the first year, working full time, often eighteen

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hours a day, he had concluded his two thousandth experiment.

After the first year things went more slowly. Still, the attempts averaged more than a thousand a year for quite a few years. Sometimes the equipment was completely rebuilt between efforts, sometimes there was the minor change of a pulsistor, a condenser, a resistor tube or transitor.

And, after each trial, he found himself still in the twentieth century. Wearily, he would get off the sending stage of the equipment, go to his journal, in which he had described, most exactly, what changes had been made in the equipment, and report the additional failure.

Then he would start writing notes, outlining the changes he'd make in the next trial.

The experiments slowed drastically in the final year. There were almost no changes possible in component placements, and component values, that would allow the equipment to conform to original theory, and still be different.

The original theory was still unchanged. It was the only possible theory that would permit time travel.

Experimentation was reduced to the use of various component shieldings, turning the equipment slightly so that it lined up differently with the magnetic currents of Earth, and, in some cases, to mental concentration on the year 3,000 at the pricse moment when he activated the time set.

Gator was still under thirty when he gave up. He did not consider it "giving up" in his mind. Everything had been tried and the theory had to be considered as disproved.

He never considered other theories. His reasoning led him, still, to the solid conviction that only one possibility would allow temporal-kinetics. That one path had been explored to its end. The journal was closed, arranged for publicaiton, and Gator went to work designing electronic qualifiers for RCA. He died in 2012.

The publisher's preface of the current edition (2998 A.D.) tells of how Gator had, at least, performed a most valuable service to mankind. He had been responsible for closing out a line of research that might have wasted the energies of many other scientists. Mathematicians had confirmed Gator's original premise, and affirmed that if any time travel was possible, it would be through application of the Gator Temporal Theorum. Since Gator had proved the theory could not be made into law, for his various equipment layouts had represented all possible mathematical equations of the theory. No further work was ever deemed worth a trial. Gator's real greatness, the preface states, was in having completely closed out a possible branch of science.

Gator's notes were scientific. Yet, one can read the changing spirit

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of those notes. From bright hopes to bleak despair! That's the changing tone running through those 9,375 trials.

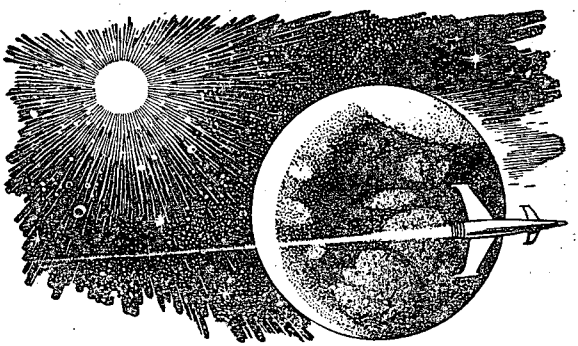
There was no rebirth of hope.

Still, I always get a mental stimulation from going through the book, sampling here and there. When I'm ready to turn the volume in, I always leaf back again, first, to Experiment 5050, in which a change of C73 from 3.75 microfarad to 3.79 was made. There is a notation that the special value condenser, held to plus-minus one tenth of one per cent had cost twelve dollars.

Then I turn the book into the librarian. Often, he walks to the door with me. We stand on the steps of the library and look out at the great force wall that surrounds our town.

"Think it will ever come down, Fifty-fifty?" he asks me.

I shake my head. Gatortown will be kept in quarantine, I'm afraid, until all nine thousand, three hundred and seventy-five of us are dead.



Where—oh, where—will you find—Isaac Asimov, Theodore Sturgeon, Lester del Rey, Poul Anderson, Robert Sheckley, William Morrison—and many others? In the next issue of FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *of course!*

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pink grass planet

by . . . Sam Merwin Jr.

A man may grieve his heart out for a paradise left behind. But five short years of human folly may make that world a nightmare.

THE STARSHIP landed at night. When Ricardo Webb stepped out on the ramp, the first thing he did was take a deep breath of the sharp, strange-familiar air of Earth. When he exhaled, in the glow of the fluorescent field-lamps, he could see a little cloud of vapor emerge and dissipate quickly against the brisk November night.

He told himself he would never curse a terrestrial winter again. After five years in the tepid shower-bath air of Lri-gTu-riANa, he even looked forward to shoveling snow. This was Earth, this was home—and it felt good to be back. Better than good, in fact.

He stared about him, searching for a warmth and a radiance that would make his happiness complete. Then Carla spun out of the whirling group of reporters, officials and just plain people who had come to meet the starship, and flung herself into his arms. "Ricci, darling!" She whispered, twisting her pretty face so that her lips met his almost vertically.

He thought, *I'll have to do something about that.* He held her sup-

In offering this delightful new Sam Merwin story to you we may be inviting just about the worst disaster that could befall an editor of a science-fantasy magazine. For, given man's eternal restlessness and his all-too-frequent subservience to fads and fancies, the tragedy so vividly depicted here may someday come true. Then we'll be accused of being an accessory before the fact, and suffer the harsh fate of prophets everywhere. A dire risk, truly!

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ple softness off at arm's length and said, "Do I know you?"

"Idiot!" She laughed and kissed him again. "Come on," she said. "Mother's cooking a turkey, and dad can't wait to ask you about fishing on Liguria."

Lri-gTu-riANa — Liguria. The contraction simplified the name for Earth-tongues, but it sounded odd to Ricardo. He hoped not too many of the once-familiar place names of Earth would sound odd to his ears. He wanted to forget about Lri-gTu-riANa for awhile, and rejoice in the incredible bright wonder of his homecoming. He said: "They use needle-rays instead of dry flies on—Liguria. It's not the same."

"Idiot!" she said again, affectionately. "*I* don't give a *fringo* how they catch fish on Liguria—that's for dad. I'm just glad you're back." She hugged his elbow. "I've got an aircar waiting."

Fringo! He wondered where Carla had picked that one up. It was a Lri-gTu-riANan expression, not entirely decent by accepted terrestrial standards. But no one who had not been to Lri-gTu-riANa would know. He wondered if he'd ever get used to calling the planet of his exile Liguria.

A Vidar newscaster intercepted them before they reached the aircar beyond the administration building. Ricardo enjoyed the man's nasal, staccato chatter after the soft slow accents he had been forced to listen to from dawn to dusk for five long years. The man said, turning his vidamike toward Carla so that she, too, would appear on two hundred million precision-tuned screens, "Mr. Webb, I see you've got a real honeycomb with you. Tell me, how does she look to you after the Ligurian *Fraislies?*"

"Great—just great!" said Ricardo sincerely.

He wondered, feeling a pang of conscience, just how much people on Earth knew about the *fraislies* —and how much they could accept without lifting their eyebrows. Everything was so different on the first civilized planet man had discovered. And Ricardo had discovered how thoroughly even the most pleasant exoticism can pall. He was relieved when the newscaster moved on to another returnee.

Carla and he took off as soon as his luggage had been inspected and cleared. He gave her the ring which he had had fashioned of a single chunk of pale blue, luminous Ligurian jade. She kissed him again as she slipped it on her fourth finger, atop the diamond-and-platinum engagement ring she had been wearing for five years.

"Oh, *darling!*" she murmured. "This is the loveliest thing! The other girls will hate me for having it—and for having you."

This time, when their lips met, he held her face upright between his palms. But when he moved his hands lower to caress her, she twisted her head again so her lips crossed his almost vertically. But

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so ardent was the embrace that he didn't really care. It was pleasantly dark and warm in the aircar, and the cushions were soft, and the automatic pilot was doing all the work . . .

Carla's mother, wearing a plastapron, met them at the door. She was a pale, plump woman, who twittered like a fluttering, migratory bird. She had set her face sternly against her daughter's engagement to Ricardo but now that he had returned indisputably famous she chose to believe that the selection of Carla's fiancé had been hers alone.

Ricardo was relieved when she fled to the kitchen, twittering over a bare pink shoulder, "I had the bird stuffed with *loocoo-sran* berries, in honor of your arrival, Ricci. Won't that be divinely nice?"

He was sure the berries would spoil his meal. If there was one thing he had developed a hatred for, beyond all others on Lri-gTu-riANa, it was the all-pervasive sweet-sour tartness of the *loocoo-sran* ingredient in that planet's cuisine. It was a standing joke in the Earth-colony that their hosts used *loocoo-sran* berries to brush their teeth, so the flavor would remain with them between meals to bolster up their egos.

Carla darted into her room and Mr. Baker put an arm across Ricardo's shoulders and led him to the servabar at one end of the living room. He was a large, hearty man with a booming voice. He said, "It's good to have you back, son. I think the occasion demands a little liquid refreshment. I picked up a case of *praglian* yesterday, in honor of your arrival.

Praglian! The thought of its thick, sweetish flavor made him physically ill. There had been a time, during the early portion of his stay on Lri-gTu-riANa, when he had enjoyed drinking the stuff. There had also been a time, before he went to Lri-gTu-riANa, when he would simply have told Mr. Baker he'd rather have whiskey—good straight Earth whiskey, 90 proof. But five years of Lri-gTu-riANan politeness had made such candor impossible. He drank *praglian,* and tried not to make a face.

Carla came wandering in, wearing snowy white boots, shorts and bolero jacket. She looked adorable, and she felt adorable as she snuggled close to him and took a sip from his glass. There was just one flaw. Now that she had her hat off, he saw that her naturally auburn hair had been dyed a pale Ligurian green.

"Why did you do it, honey?" he asked her, no longer able to obey the inner compulsion toward politeness he had acquired on the alien planet.

She thrust a laughing face up at him and said, "Isn't it *crspaltish?* All the girls are doing it lately. It's the absolute rage."

Of course, she mispronounced *crspaltish.* But Ricardo didn't correct her. The less Ligurian he heard,

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he told himself bitterly, the better he was *going to like it.*

To his surprise, he enjoyed the dinner. Apparently, the *loocoo-sran* berries had been adulterated to suit terrestrial palates, or else he was so used to the flavor that his own taste had become blunted. At any rate, the radar-cooked turkey was marvelous—crisp and brown on the outside, and unbelievably tender and white within. And the rest of the food was untainted with Ligurian seasonings. He ate until the lastex band of his clout made groves against the skin of his stomach.

Satiated, he sat on the living room sofa, his fingers entwined with Carla's, and wondered why anyone should want to go to Lri-gTu-riANa when Earth was so much better, so much more suited to the race of men. In the dim light, he had to look hard to see that Carla's hair was Ligurian green. He didn't strain his eyes.

Mrs. Baker, in the rockofit chair, was wearing the *flausmraka* bolero he had brought her, and Mrs. Baker, in his layback seat, was puffing on the tube of the Ligurian *clisra*-pipe Ricardo had dug out of his luggage right after dinner. He hadn't quite mastered the technique and made faint slurping sounds at regular intervals.

"I'm so *glad* you're back," Carla whispered, close to his ear. "It was worth waiting five years for. Or an eternity," she added, snuggling even closer to him.

Ricardo gave her hand a squeeze. This was Earth. This was home. This was Carla, glorious in bolero jacket and snowy boots.

At nine o'clock the vidar announcer appeared and said, "And now, Rafflex Exterminator, the exterminator that terminates, presents its long-awaited ninety-minute superspectacular in tri-di triple-color —*Life on Liguria!* See the famous authentic *shlastric* festival, learn how the seductive *loofahs* select their mates, thrill to the excitement and danger of a *kifs*-hunt in the deadly *snree-achian* jungle, all brought to you by courtesy of Rafflex Exterminator, the ex—"

"Come on, honey," said Ricardo, getting to his feet. "Let's take a walk. Will you excuse us, Mrs. Baker?"

Mrs. Baker was so deeply engrossed in the vidar that he had to repeat the question twice.

Outside, the night was warm—Carla lived almost a thousand miles south of the spaceport—and the moon was as large and mellow as a lump of unsalted butter. It looked dangerously huge and close to Ricardo, accustomed as he was to the four swift and tiny satellites of Lri-gTu-riANa. But the poplars whispered in the soft breeze and the grass of the lawn was crisply tender beneath his feet.

Carla kissed him—sideways, Liguria-style again—and then said with a sigh, "That's what I love about you most, Ricci. You're so courtly and polite. Asking mother

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if we could take a walk! I don't even mind your having had a *loofa* on Liguria."

"What makes you think I had a *loofa?*" he asked.

"Silly! Doesn't everyone?" she countered. "When in Rome . . ."

"As a matter of fact, there wasn't much choice," he told her.

He was glad, in a way, that she had accepted the fact that his years on Lri-gTu-riANa had not been celibate. Yet her easy acquiescence bothered him a little. It seemed—un-Earthlike. It would have been more in character if she had given him hell. It would have been more flattering to his ego. In her casual acceptance of a biological frailty, she seemed almost like a *fraislie.*

No one who had not lived on the planet could ever really understand its society. Not that the natives weren't surprisingly human. In sober fact they came as close to being human as any race could without actually belonging to the same species. But their society had developed along more temperate lines. After all, Lri-gTu-riANa was a milder planet than Earth.

There were no sex crimes on Lri-gTu-riANa, because there was no sexual repression. Mating had been reduced to a mere social pleasure—almost as casually accepted as the custom of shaking hands on Earth. The only thing outlawed on Lri-gTu-riANa was ugliness in any shape or form. That hatred of ugliness had been the most difficult factor for the Earth visitors to adjust to. No matter how useful anything was, no matter how sorely needed—if it was ugly, it was out—O-U-T, *out!*

Without closing his eyes, Ricardo could see in vivid visual retrospect his red-headed chief, Captain Luders, turning scarlet with exasperation. He had not been allowed to employ a water-purifier simply because the natives hadn't thought it looked beautiful enough.

He could hear Luders storming, in the seclusion of the inner office, "Damned pink, candy-box world! I'm beginning to feel like the little man on a wedding cake. For five credits, I'd . . ."

What Luders would have done for five credits had been both obscene and explicit. But the incident had occurred during the early months, before one of the loveliest *fraislies* on Lri-gTu-riANa became the captain's *loofa.* Luders had lost a lot of rough edges in the years since, and had become a great stickler for beauty, naked and unadorned.

Ricardo was brought back to Earth with a thud. Carla was talking about plans for their wedding, talking joyously and exictedly about showers and luncheons and bridesmaids costumes. He heard himself say, "Can't that wait till tomorrow, honey? I'm a little beat."

Instantly he wondered why he'd said it. For five years, he had lived with the constant, gloriously sustaining thought of marrying Carla the moment he got back to Earth.

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It had been like the proverbial bottle of whiskey at the end of the ditch. He had even feared that she might turn faithless, or be swept off her feet by another man. He had inwardly denied himself full, and traditionally customary satisfaction with his own *loofa,* preserving a tiny part of himself for her alone.

They had thought him a cold fish on Lri-gTu-riANa, because of Carla. Yet here he was, putting off the very thing he'd held himself aloof for. Aloof—a *loofa.* As he undressed for the night, he wondered if space-cafard hadn't got him. Certainly his behavior and feelings had not been wholly rational. Quite the reverse . . .

When he awoke the next morning, the sun—Earth's sun, *his* sun—was shining low and bright in the east. Birds—Earth-birds—were singing their morning songs and a faint, wonderful aroma of coffee came through the window from the kitchen wing of the house. All the confusion, all the uncertainty, all the self-doubt of the night before had been washed away. Ricardo stretched lazily, then rose and shuffled across the carpet to look out the window.

He actually cried out with horror at what he saw.

It seemed like nightmare, but—it wasn't at all. The neat lawn and trim poplars were a rich, familiar pink. If it hadn't been for the green of the hills west of the town, he'd have thought himself still on Lri-gTu-riANa. Dazed, he turned away from the shocking spectacle just as Carla, who had heard him cry out, came into the room.

He said, "What's happened to the trees, to the lawn?"

She looked pleased, even a little smug. She said, "Isn't it simply *crspaltish,* Ricci? We were the very first in town to use chlorodyll on our grass. You know, the stuff that makes the foliage pink on Liguria."

"I know," Ricardo said grimly.

"The best part of it is that it won't turn green again," she told him proudly. "And it doesn't spread, so no one can use it who hasn't paid for it."

"Praise Allah for small blessings," said Ricardo, appalled.

"What's that?" Carla wanted to know.

"Oh, nothing," he muttered, running a hand through his hair.

"Now almost everybody has chlorodyll grass," the girl went on. "Out West, in farming districts, the big owners hire aircars to dust the prairies. In a few years, the whole world will be pink."

Ricardo thought despairingly of the green hills of Earth, for which he had longed for so many years. He thought of the dark tropical forests, of the mosses of the Arctic tundra, of the great grasslands of Africa, Asia and South America. All pink, passionate cake-frosting pink! Or soon to be. He closed his eyes.

Carla kept on talking. "And tonight, they're having a ball in

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our honor at the country club. It's going to be just like a *shrastlic* festival and some of the girls say they're going to be real *loofas*. It's becoming quite the thing. But mother and I don't think it's exactly proper unless they're married. I want you to see my costume, right after breakfast, to be sure it's a hundred per cent authentic."

He opened his eyes. He said, "Beat it, honey, will you? I want to take a shower and get dressed."

He didn't shower at once. Instead, he sat on the edge of the bed, being careful to assume an angle that forbade his seeing the pink foliage outside. He thought of the young people of Earth, ardently pursuing Ligurian customs, turning the planet into an imitation of Lri-gTu-riANa. He thought of girls like Carla turning *loofa*. At least, on Lri-gTu-riANa, it was the real thing.

He packed his bag and got dressed and walked through the French window, across the pink grass to the street. He hailed a passing vehicle and was given a lift to the skyport. There, he caught an aircab north to the spaceport.

The interstellar official looked at him curiously as he reported. He was a man of native curiosity, which was why he held the job he did. It was a job where questions were important. He said, "You're sure you want to go back for a ten-year hitch. Not that we aren't glad to have an old Liguria-hand back. But you haven't given yourself much time here on Earth. Your girl run out on you?"

"No," Ricardo didn't want to waste time talking. He wouldn't feel safe until he was aboard the big gleaming starship awaiting its payload at the end of the ramp outside. "Just say, I think I'm better suited to life on Lri-gTu-riANa after five years there."

"Sure you don't want a little more time to adjust. It's a big decision. And ten years is—"

"Ten years is the longest hitch I can sign for," said Ricardo. "I intend to stay on Lri-gTu-riANa for life."

"Well, we're not going to stop you," said the official. "Care for a spot of *praglian?* One for the road?"

"Why not?" said Ricardo as the official bent to open a drawer. He was going to drink *praglian* from now on and like it. He clinked glasses with his host and downed the Ligurian brew. It was warm and sweet and not unpleasant on his tongue.

"By the way," said the official, nodding toward a large carton that stood beside Ricardo's bags, "if it's not hush-hush, would you mind telling me why you're spending credits taking seeds to a fertile planet like Lri-gTu-riANa?"

"Because," said Ricardo, speaking slowly, "I'm going to turn the whole damned planet green."

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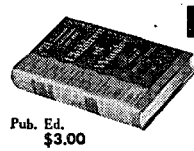

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